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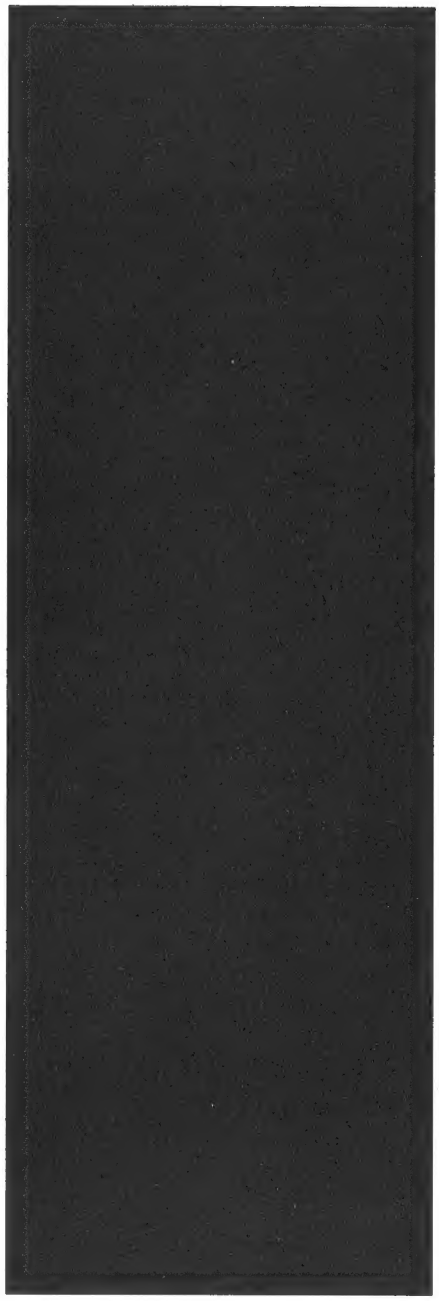

GREED MAGAZINE ISSUE FIVE
SECOND QUARTER 1988

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THE PROFIT MARGIN

KURT "SATCHMO" SAYENGA

We have a bit of a problem answering the mail in a timely fashion. For instance, the mail from GREED #3 hasn't been answered yet, nor have we been able to jot off so much as a note to those of you who blessed us with an ungodly number of unsolicited submissions. My apologies to those of you who haven't heard from us. You will eventually. That doesn't mean we'll print anything, though.

All of your letters have been quite favorable. If I didn't despise letters columns, I'd print a few of them, but I do, so I won't. I will, however, print replies to our correspondents' most frequently-posed queries: 1) Diana Rigg, Amanda Pays, Catharine O'Hara and Siouxsie Sioux; 2) Between three and seven inches—it all depends; 3) To a certain extent, *everything* in GREED is a parody; 4) The Cramps, The Nomads, Buzzcocks, Wire, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Frank Sinatra, 100 Flowers, Joy Division, The Fall, Elvis Presley, Minor Threat, The Cure, Naked Raygun, Faith, Barracudas, X, Angry Samoans, Robyn Hitchcock/Soft Boys, Gang of

Four, The Birthday Party, That Petrol Emotion, The Coasters, The Beatles, Plasticland, The Misfits, James Brown, Scientists, The Kinks, Sex Pistols, The Chocolate Watchband, The Jam, Avengers, The Beach Boys, Aretha Franklin, Rezillos, Patsy Cline, etc.

This issue does not include interviews with Midnight Oil, the Dickies, or Ignition. The Midnight Oil thing fell through when the band decided to cancel scheduled meetings with the press in order to "put all their energy into the set." As for the Dickies, well, we had three interviews scheduled and none of them happened. We still like 'em, though, even if *Killer Klowns* was a big disappointment. The Ignition interview was a casualty of lack of space and editorial inertia. It will appear next issue, along with pieces on Wire, Band of Susans, Half Japanese, Naked Raygun (unless something goes awry) and a few other performers—oh, my heart leaps at the thought of writing more stories about musicians, even ones I *like*. Whenever I find myself writing about "sonic textures" and "blistering guitars" a little voice whispers in my ear: *Dump the day job, dump the magazine, go to Grad School, get a doctorate in American Culture, spend the rest of your days lecturing on the sociopolitical significance of Wonder Bread and Talk Radio...*

Anyway, Arcane Comix mainman Steve Niles and I will head out to San Diego, California at the beginning of August to attend a gathering of "comic book professionals" and their little fans. Plans are being made to conduct drunken interviews with several of your favorite Alternative Comics Artistes. Fairly definite: Bob Burden, the creator of *Flaming Carrot.*

Thanks (I guess) to DC's *City-Paper* for the long profile, and for teaching me a valuable lesson: Never allow yourself to be photographed at close range with a wide angle lens unless you want your nose to look ten feet long. My nose is a little smashed up, but it's not ten feet long. It's about two feet long.

And let's clear up a few misunderstandings that arose from that article: I'm not a paralegal and would sooner cut my throat than become one; the first issue of GREED appeared two years ago, not four years ago; and GREED has a backer now, but the backing is limited and we're still ten blocks away from the road to financial security. This means that those of you who buy one copy of GREED for your 12-person group house might just as well shoot me in the back and hop up and down on my corpse.

Apologies to Bert, who spells his last name Q-U-E-I-R-O-Z (one of the four spellings that appeared in GREED #4.). ■

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EDITORARTDIRECTOR
KSAYENGA
ASSOCIATEEDITOR
ACHERVINSKY
CONTRIBUTINGEDITORS
PHAYESCELYJWU
SOUTHERNBUREAU
CDRAKE
GIRLS&BOYSTHISISSUE
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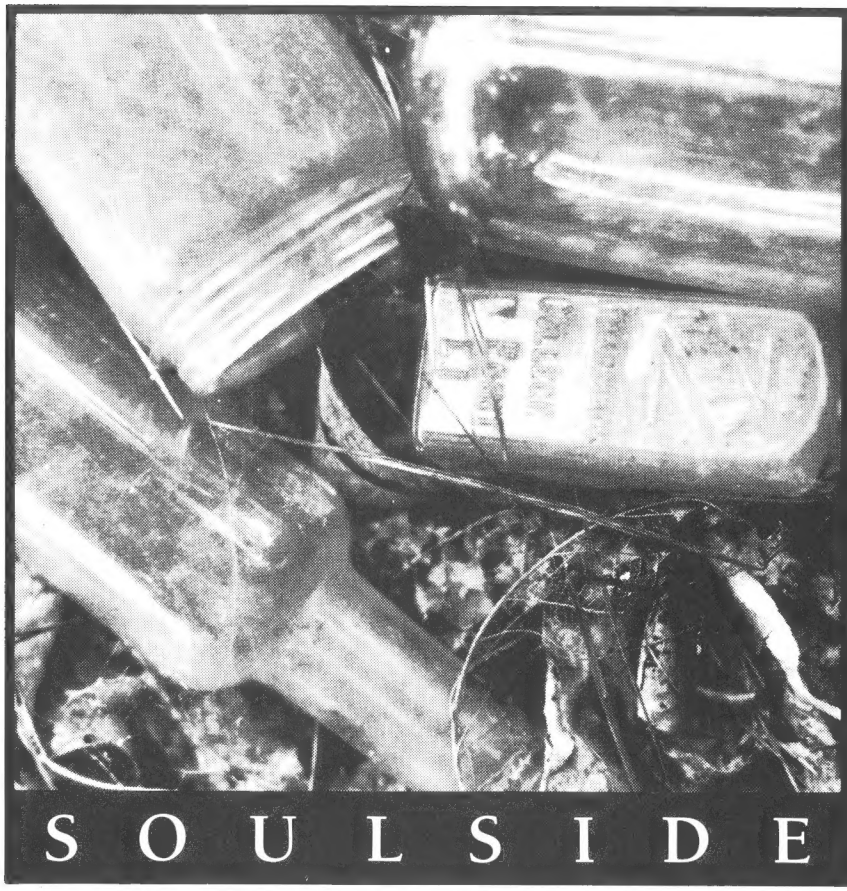

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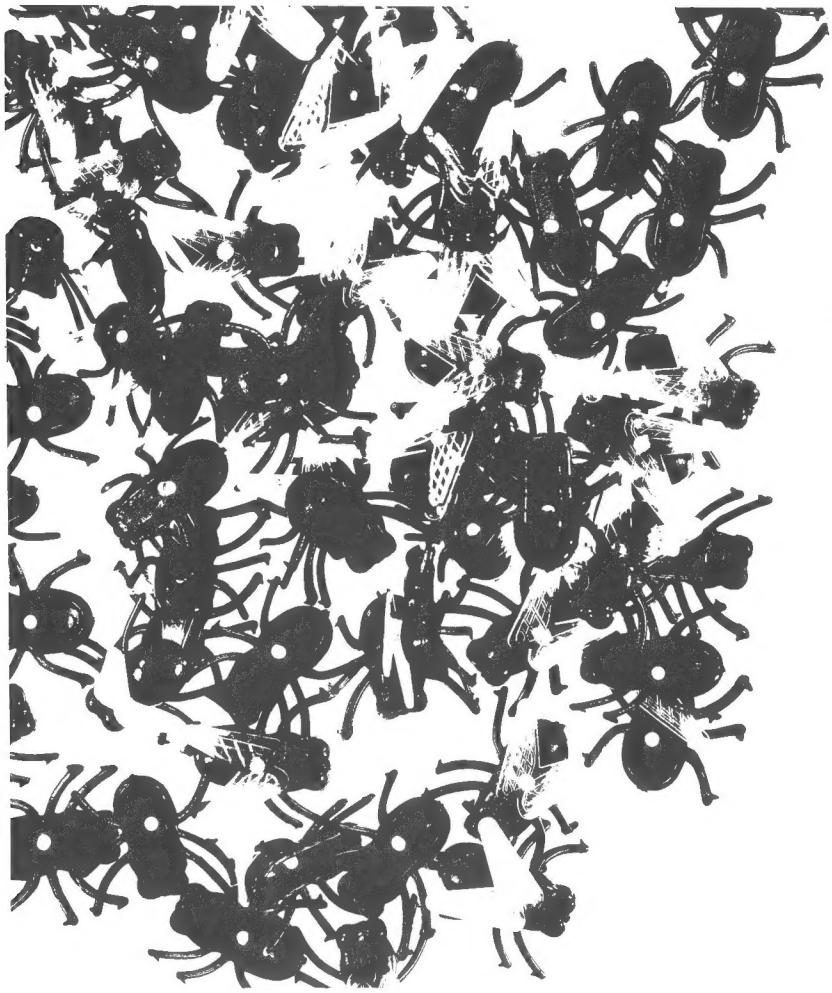

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The Wild Ones

The Trial of Socrates by I.F. Stone (Little, Brown and Company)
Chaos by James Gleick (Viking)
Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung by Lester Bangs (Knopf)
Music by Philip Glass (Harper & Row)
The Fatal Shore by Robert Hughes (Vintage)

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

—John Tarrant

PHILIP GLASS—TORMENTED ARTIST, AVANT-GARDE COMPOSER, OR SPACED-OUT NOODLE BRAIN?

I have read an uncommon amount of non-fiction lately, and I thought I'd write about some of the better books on my list. Oddly, the five I chose all share a common theme: the flouncing of the establishment, the bucking of the average, the struggle to rise above mediocrity—or, in Tarrant's view, progress.

I.F. Stone's examination of the events and ideas which led to the execution of Socrates is perhaps the best example of this insurgent motif, and not solely for its subject: Stone himself is probably the finest living paradigm of the conscientious objector to have come down the pike in the last thirty years. His essays of the '50s and '60s were clear, unabashed protests against the idiocies of McCarthyism and Vietnam, among other American follies (these rails being collected in *The Haunted Fifties* and *Polemics and Prophecies*).

The Trial of Socrates is, in turn, the ideal example of how to examine a period in which you did not live. Stone methodically began by studying the Greek language before delving into the original trial manuscripts, scanty though they were, and scrupulously weeded through them for common threads of narrative, which would indicate a stronger basis in fact. Moreover, his presentation of the facts of the case are straightforward and only slightly biased—not so's you'd mind. For anyone interested in the politics of ancient Greece, or just curious about the origins of democracy (unlike, say, Ed Meese), this is a great read.

Two other Greeks, Leucippus and Democritus, first suggested the presence of what we now call atoms, breaking from the traditional belief in the Four Elements. James Gleick's new book, *Chaos*, suggests that we may be on the verge of an equally significant break from traditions in current scientific thought.

The new science of chaos is to the established physics scene what punk is to rock and roll: the logical outgrowth of intelligent malcontents who refuse to accept the flawed notion that there isn't any more room for discovery and original thought in their respective fields. And studies of sensitive dependence on initial conditions, inquiries into the configurations of randomness, and investigations of "strange attractors" are all yielding vast amounts of new data—information which throws light into previously dark regions of human experience, as Gleick's book sheds new insights into this Brave New World.

His writing is very clear and easy to follow, which helps, especially when he's trying to explain some of the wild theories of Mandelbrot's curves, fractals, and so on. This is must reading for anyone who wants to be scientifically literate for the coming century.

Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung is also must reading, but for, uh, different reasons. Greil Marcus, who's responsible for the cool "Real Life Top Ten" in the *Village Voice*, has done a pretty decent job of collecting some of the works of Lester Bangs, who ☞

truly "persisted in trying to adapt the world to himself."

This is the sort of book you can either read on and off between other books (like filler), or straight through to get a sense of the man, the music, and the era (ahem). The piece on the Clash is pretty interesting, and there's the infamous eating-of-Elvis'-innards scenario mentioned in last issue's Elvis Lit roundup. Sadly, no one on the current rock scene even comes close to matching Lester's loony brilliance.

Speaking of comparisons, Lester Bangs and Philip Glass may be seen as working in the same field, but you really couldn't find any similarities between them...except one: they both try to make you *think* more about the music you listen to. That's quite a subversive idea, too, in the robot-rockin' 1980s.

The new science of chaos is to the established physics scene what punk is to rock and roll: the logical outgrowth of intelligent malcontents who refuse to accept the flawed notion that there isn't any more room for discovery and original thought in their respective fields.

But where Bangs used lots of mystifying diction and special effects ifyaknowwhatImean, Philip Glass relies simply on lucidity. It's his forte, as *Music by Philip Glass* makes evident. Some may find it a little like reading the *World Almanac*, but in this election year, I for one was quite pleased to hear someone speak the plain facts about his own life for a change; and Glass has led none too mundane a life. (Additionally, you may be pleasantly surprised to learn that Glass *actually wrote the words in his book.*)

Music by Glass includes librettos from his three major operas, *Einstein on the Beach, Akhnaten,* and *Satyagraha,* which makes it sort of handy to have. They don't really "read" all that well, but they're a harmless inclusion, and contribute to the feeling of completeness this book encompasses. Actually, that feeling is a little frightening; you occasionally put down the book thinking it must be signalling the end of his career. But no, the book does cover newer projects, like the *Songs From Liquid Days* lp (which I also recommend).

The Fatal Shore, a history of Australia, is a remarkable undertaking as well, and puts Robert Hughes right up there with Barbara Tuchman as a person who can write without sentimentality about the past. This is a history bereft of the usual slipshod generalizations and placid repetitions of hearsay.

Hughes has obviously gone to great lengths to obtain primary source materials on the transportation of British convicts to Botany Bay since Captain Cook's discovered the continent, but he manages to incorporate quotes effortlessly into his engaging depictions of the rugged outback. The result is a book that may look a little imposing, but is really as fun to read, with the advantage of being good for you, too (because history is always useful at parties).

The cast of characters is many and varied in this unprecedented account of the men and women who built Australia, but they in no way resemble the nasty surfeit of imported Australian "personalities" gamboling around here lately. My impression is that Australia today is generally populated by higher-calibre specimens than "Crocodile" Dundee. You may wish to seriously consider moving to Australia as a less odious alternative to remaining in this country under President Bush.

Also Recommended:

City of Glass, Ghosts, and *The Locked Room* by Paul Auster (aka "The New York Trilogy") (Penguin)

This trilogy will probably take you two or three days to get through, tops—trust me, you won't put these books down—and though you'll sigh at some of the more awkward sentences, by the time you've finished reading the last word on the last page of the last volume in the series, you'll have noticed something quite odd: you have changed. Your perceptions of literature—indeed, of the world around you—will no longer be what they once were. I think that's all you can really ask for from any work of art. ■

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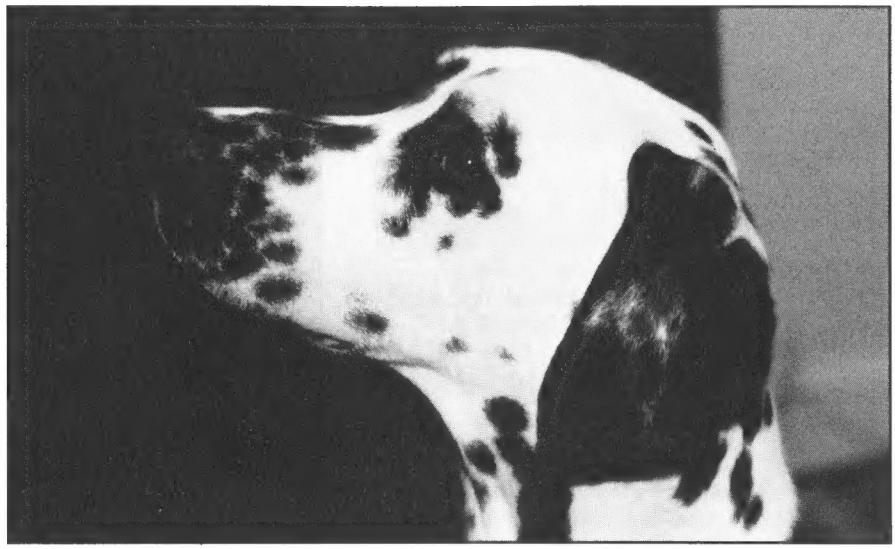
RECORDS
KRYPTO

Dog-Eared Needle Drops



the paws that refreshes

After months of searching, we have found a reviewer whose peerless taste and unique perspective perfectly match GREED's hard-nosed, no-holds-barred coverage of the music scene. Better still, he works for free, doesn't complain about editing, and is not afraid to express his true feelings, regardless of his friendships with a few of the artists he is called upon to review or the publisher's heartfelt desire to see the ad money increase with every issue. As our reviewer cannot write (he lacks opposable thumbs), we have recorded his reactions to each album (all played at deafening volume) and more or less guarantee that we didn't make the whole thing up.

Pato Banton—Never Give In (Primitive Man): Farted. Looked bugged. Eventually fell asleep.

Moral Crux (Velvetone): Groaned, flopped on his side.

The Honeymoon in Red (Widowspeak): Barked a lot. Growled a little. Walked in front of the stereo, making the album skip, not that you could really tell.

Butthole Surfers—Hairway to Steven (Touch and Go): Jumped off the couch, ran into the bedroom and covered his head with his paws.

Pailhead—No Bunny/I Will Refuse (Wax Trax): Looked confused, then went to bed.

Naked Raygun—Vanilla Blue (Sandpounder): Jumped around, barked, got playful.

Robyn Hitchcock— Globe of Frogs (A&M): Sat on the couch and chewed on his bone.

The Fall—Palace of Swords Reversed (COG): Left room immediately (he seems to like Brix-era Fall best).

The Fall—The Frenz Experiment (Beggar's Banquet): Chewed his bone happily throughout most of the lp. Listened quite attentively to the cover of the Kinks' "Victoria." Barked at "Hit the North."

Salem 66—Natural Disasters, National Treasures (Homestead): Slept soundly throughout side one. Didn't get around to playing side two.

The Didjits—Hey Judester (Touch and Go): Krypto still being pretty much a puppy, the high-energy punk sound of the Didjits made him run around like a little kid on a sugar rush.

Lyle Lovett—Pontiac (MCA): Preferred the moody, scary songs on side two to the songs on side one.

The Space Negros—The Space Negros Do Generic Ethnic Muzak Versions of All Your Favorite Underground Punk/Psychedelic Songs From the Sixties (Arf Arf): Puzzled him. ■

BEST NEW RELEASE

NAKED RAYGUN—JETTISON (CAROLINE)
MORE RAW POWER WITH A POP PUNCH FROM THE BEST ROCK BAND IN AMERICA. SHARP, AGGRESSIVE AND ANYTHING BUT SENTIMENTAL. THE CD HAS FIVE EXTRA TRACKS, INCLUDING THE SUBLIME "VANILLA BLUE."

Band of Susans—*Hope Against Hope* (Blast First US): A nice rage and churn that comes from the decidely smarter side of the "noise band" cadre. Best of all, the lyrics dwell more on politics than setting girls on fire.

THE TERRIFIC **CAROLINE RECORDS** HAS A ROSTER THAT INCLUDES SUCH WORTHIES AS THE SWANS, NAKED RAYGUN, PUSSY GALORE, WHITE ZOMBIE, THE THREE JOHNS, WORLD DOMINATION ENTERPRISES, GAYE BYKERS ON ACID, AND THE ABECEDARIANS. **DISCHORD RECORDS** HAS A SLEW OF INTERESTING RELEASES COMING UP, FOLLOWING A SLUMP THAT HAD MORE TO DO WITH THE INSTABILITY OF THE DC MUSIC SCENE THAN THE LABEL ITSELF. **4AD** STILL HAS THE BEST-DESIGNED RECORD/CD PACKAGES IN THE WORLD, AND THE ADDITION OF PIXIES AND THROWING MUSES TO THE LABEL HAS ADDED AN EDGE THAT'S BEEN MISSING FROM 4AD SINCE THE BIRTHDAY PARTY JUMPED SHIP YEARS AGO. **GIANT** HAS GROWN RAPIDLY SINCE ITS LAUNCH LAST YEAR, FUELED BY THE SUCCESS OF DAG NASTY'S *FIELD DAY* LP. UPCOMING GIANT RELEASES INCLUDE RECORDS BY UNIFORM CHOICE, G.I., ANNA DOMINO, AND THE FAREWELL ALBUM BY DC'S MARGINAL MAN. THE NEW AND NAUGHTY **BLAST FIRST US** HAS PUT OUT FAB LPS BY UT, BAND OF SUSANS, AND HEAD OF DAVID, AND WILL SOON BRING OUT A SERIES OF PICTURE DISCS IN WHICH ARTISTS PICK THEIR FAVORITE SONGS AND DESIGN THE RECORD PACKAGING (SAVAGE PENCIL LEADS OFF).

A GOOD LABEL IS HARD TO SELL

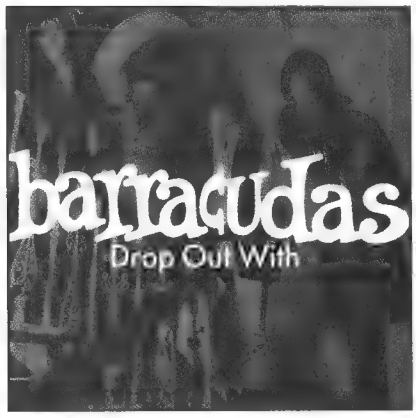
X—Live at the Whiskey A Go-Go (Elektra): For an X without Billy Zoom this record is pretty good, spanning the band's musical history from early brilliance to the better-than-average Rock and Roll they play nowadays.

The *Mekons—New York* (ROIR): Combines drunken performances with drunken ramblings in various bars. A very endearing little document containing many Mekon Post-Industrial Depression classics.

Prince—*Lovesexy* (Paisley Park): This is GREAT and you should stop being an ignorant racist asshole and run right out and buy the damn thing NOW.

Honeymoon in Red (Widowspeak): Portions of the long-unreleased (and now we know why) collaboration between the godlike Birthday Party and Lydia Lunch, who's sort of a humorless junkie version of Judy Tenuta. Actually most of this is okay, although the days when I would slice my wrists and bleed whilst listening to 13.13, Lydia's last decent project, are far in the past.

BEST REISSUE



DROP OUT WITH THE BARRACUDAS (EAST SIDE DIGITAL) THIS CD REISSUE OF THE FIRST CLASSIC BARRACUDAS LP (NOW SEVEN YEARS OLD) DRAGS MID-60S ROCK AND POP INTO THE '80S, THEN KICKS THE SHIT OUT OF IT. THE RESULT IS BY TURNS FUNNY AND FRIGHTENING. THIS SMART COMPILATION FOLLOWS THE UK RELEASE SEQUENCING AND INCLUDES EXTRA TRACKS, MOST NOTABLY THE 'CUDAS SARDONIC COVER OF "SURFER JOE" (WHICH FEATURES THE WORST GUITAR SOLO EVER RECORDED OUTSIDE OF A BELINDA CARLISLE ALBUM). LET'S HOPE THEY'LL RE-RELEASE THE BAND'S KILLER SECOND ALBUM, *MEAN TIME*.

NEW RECORDS WE ACTUALLY LISTEN TO

(As opposed to records we "admire in principle" or listen to when we're "in the mood for that sort of music" or maybe played once or twice but haven't stuck it on a tape and played it again and again while we're on the subway or at work performing some monotonous task)

PIXIES—*SURFER ROSA*
PRINCE—*LOVESEXY*
NAKED RAYGUN—*JETTISON*
GODFATHERS—*BIRTH, SCHOOL, WORK, DEATH*
THE FALL—*THE FRENZ EXPERIMENT*
ROBYN HITCHCOCK
—*GLOBE OF FROGS*
THE JESUS & MARY CHAIN
—*BARBED WIRE KISSES*
LIVE SKULL—*DUSTED*
LYLE LOVETT—*PONTIAC*
WIRE—*A BELL IS A CUP...*

Pixies—*Surfer Rosa* (4AD): Burning guitars, catchy songs, funny lyrics—a band too good to live.

Wire—*A Bell is a Cup Until It is Struck* (Engima): Those who hold up *Chairs Missing* as their favorite album of all time will despair at the absence of upfront aggression in this record and fear the worst—that Wire has gone soft. To a certain extent that's true (at its best the music here is hypnotic; at its worst, soporific), but aside from the brain-dead "Kidney Bingos" single, the band's rage, frustration and alientation are intact, just wrapped in a much sweeter pill, something that's easy on the ear but at bottom quite disturbing.

Half Japanese—*US Teens Are Spoiled Bums* (50 Skidillion Watts): A 7" with four songs, two from the "Music To Strip By" album (buy it!) and two new gems from Don Fleming, "Patty Hearst" and "Patti Smith," which Don sings with his characteristic deadpan (counterpointed by his stinging guitar).

Monty Python—*The Final Rip-Off* (Virgin): A sort of "greatest hits" double-album offering hours of scabrous wit and anti-social singalongs. Not recommended for humorless dolts.

Throwing Muses—*House Tornado* (4AD/Sire): Eccentric singing, interesting songwriting, middling musicianship. I like it but I wish I didn't.

COMPACT DISC HORROR!

At Christmastime last year I became the somewhat reluctant owner of a Sony D-10 compact disc player, a sleek portable job with an impressive array of features. I expected I'd use it mostly to play classical music, assuming that the kind of rock and roll I like would be impossible to find in the Format From Hell. This has proven untrue. Finding underground music on CD is a real bitch, but no more so than tracking down any alternative/underground music now that the big record companies have managed to squash the flow of import pressings (and that includes import CD pressings, which are in general vastly preferable to US CDs—they're better mixed, better packaged, and often give you a lot more music for your money).

Here's a sort of mini consumer guide for those of you who, like it or not, find yourself entering the Brave New World of CD.

• **Rykodisc Rules. Rykodisc is an audiophile label that puts the latest technology at the service of the artist and carries a wide cross-section of artists and titles, linked mostly by musicianship. Frank Zappa has personally supervised the release of his entire catalog on the label, although I took a vow in 1976 that I would tear my ears off with pliers before I listened to another Zappa album, so I can't tell you much about 'em. I can vouch for the Mission of Burma CD, an 81-minute disc that's worth buying a CD player to hear; Duke Ellington's *Anatomy of a Murder* soundtrack; DEVO's quirky *EZ Listening Disc*, which contains muzak versions of their songs (I know, I know—why bother turning muzak into muzak, but really, it's pretty funny); and the Jimi Hendrix *Live at Winterland* disc. Rykodisc has also released solo CDs by three members of**

the Church, which, unfortunately, are not packaged the way the Kiss solo albums were. My favorite was Ace's—what was yours?

• **Rhino Rules As Well.** Rhino Records crams its CDs with music, packages them beautifully, and works hard to maintain the atmosphere of the original recordings it rereleases. An excellent example of this is Rhino's *The Sun Story*, which gathers together 20 original Sun Records tracks by Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison and many others without turning the original recordings into processed cheese spread (the way many RCA Elvis CDs have turned out).

• **4AD's Okay, Too.** 4AD's CDs are superbly packaged and take full advantage of the format's length. Many albums are filled out with 12" releases; for instance, the Pixies' *Surfer Rosa* is backed up with the entire *Come On Pilgrim* ep, and the Cocteau Twins' Garlands includes early Peel session recordings. 4AD has released the Birthday Party classics *Prayers on Fire* and *Junkyard* (but neither is bundled with the *Mutiny* 12"—a stupid move on somebody's part), and, best of all, a Colin Newman CD that backs the Wire artiste's long-out-of-print albums *Not To* and *Provisionally Entitled The Singing Fish* (78 minutes) and includes a six-track CD single (18 minutes).

• **Fall CDs.** Just about everything ever recorded by the frighteningly prolific Fall is coming out on CD. Situation Two/Beggars Banquet have released three absolutely indispensable CDs that combine the lps *Hip Priest and Kamerads, The Wonderful and Frightening World of the Fall* and *This Nation's Saving Grace* with rare material from the Fall's many 12" and 7" releases; each disc is quite long, with *Hip Priest* taking the prize at 79.55 minutes. Line Records has released *Hex Enduction Hour* and *Perverted By Language* (with no extra tracks, but what the hell). *In Palace of Swords Reversed* and *Bend Sinister* are also both on CD with extra tracks.

• **That Petrol Emotion.** Demon Records' CD release of *Manic Pop Thrill* sounds great and has rare and previously unreleased material—buy it. The Polydor *Babble* CD, though, sounds flat—the US album version has a lot more snap, and it's longer.

• **Wire CDs.** Wire's three great reasons to go on living, *Pink Flag, Chairs Missing,* and *154*, are all available on CD through EMI Records. Each CD contains extra tracks, although the four weak additions to *154* harm instead of enhance the original album. Enigma's CD release of last year's so-so The Ideal Copy is backed with the fab *Snakedrill* ep, which legitimizes the whole package. The CD version of *A Bell Is A Cup Until It Is Struck* contains an interesting alternate version of "The Queen Of Ur and the King of Um" and live versions of "Drill" and "Over Theirs."

• **Buzzcocks.** *Another Music in a Different Kitchen* and *Love Bites* are both available—get them!

• **Robyn Hitchcock.** All of Hitchcock's post-Soft Boys records are out of CD, digitally-remixed by the artist padded with plenty of previously-unreleased or rare material. The exception is *Globe of Frogs*, his Major Label Debut. An ominous development...

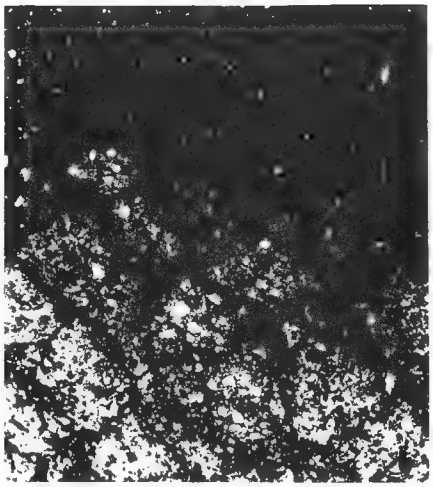
• **Caroline Records.** The label has released CDs by Pussy Galore (just the idea sorta blows your mental circuit breakers), Naked Raygun, and the Swans (*Children of God*, a double-album that fits comfortably on one CD).

Capitol
FRANK SINATRA
SINGS FOR ONLY THE LONELY
Produced by VOYLE GILMORE
Arranged and Conducted by NELSON RIDDLE
*Previously Unreleased Selection
©1957 CAPITOL RECORDS, INC. / ©1987 CAPITOL RECORDS, INC.
COMPACT DISC DIGITAL AUDIO

• **Many Touch and Go** releases are on CD, as are most of SST's more successful artists (Black Flag, Sonic Youth, Meat Puppets, Husker Du—although anyone who pays big bucks for Husker Du's Metal Circus ep deserves to get ripped off).

If you don't live in a teeming metropolis, you'll probably have to go the mail order route to get these things. I've had some success with AB-CD in New York (212-645-2409) and BCD in Boston, Mass (617-267-8877).

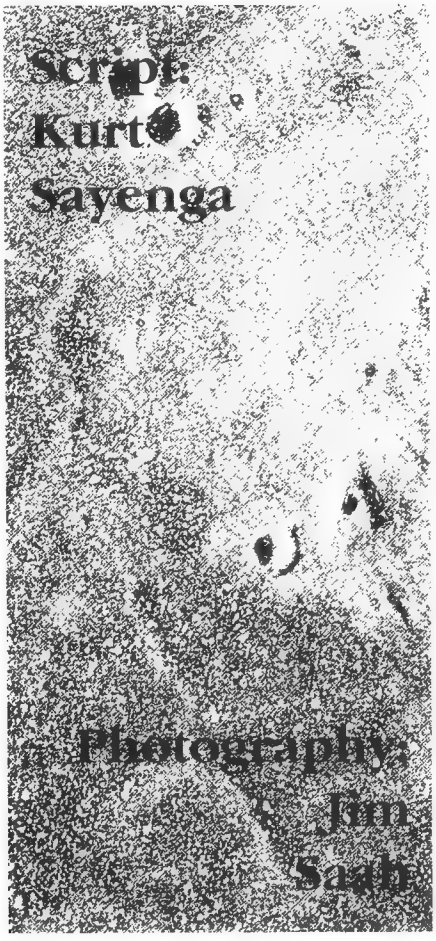
UT—*In Gut's House* (Blast First US): Loud and beautiful. Two platters full of joy and pain (and lots of feedback). Likely to cause arguments with your Significant Other, the basic drift of which is that you've lost whatever taste you once might have had and now like just about everything that drones and is sort of depressing.



Let's see...Pussy Galore in the second issue, Sonic Youth in the third, Live Skull in the fourth, and now the Swans in GREED #5. Uh-oh—we're running out of pretentious New York noise bands to interview!

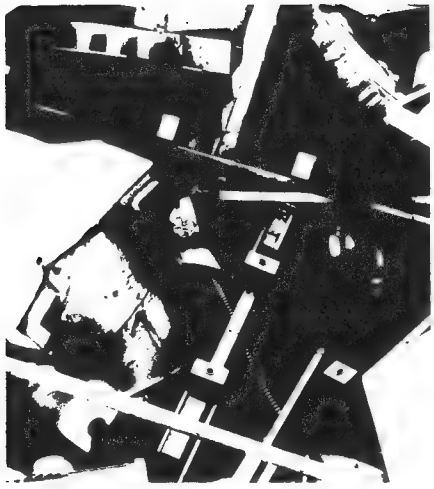
Lately the Swans have moved away from noisy industrial grind toward melody—BIG melody, with BIG orchestration, the better to serve their BIG THEMES. This is music to play while walking on water. By bringing warmer tones into their sonic palette (do I sound like a jazz reviewer?), the Swans have increased the accessibility and ironic bite of their music.

SWANS



Someone warned me before this interview that the Swans are creeps. Of course, the same person once told me that the Attorney General is an odious little weasel, and now the Meesketeer and I hang out every Friday at The Palm swilling grog and hitting on waitresses. Ed is quite the ladies man, and he's got an opening line few can beat: "Hey, hon, it's yer lucky day—America's top cop is gonna buy you a drink!" But anyway, Swans leader/vocalist Michael Gira seemed nice enough, not that his demeanor has a thing to do with the quality of his music, which is really all anyone who doesn't have to live with the guy should care about. But you want to know more, don't you? You want to know his motivations, you want a little background. You readers and your silly demands...

With his bottle-blonde hair, fat cigar, suspenders, white t-shirt and knee-high black engineers' boots, Gira looked like a young Luftwaffe pilot cooling off after a mission. Except Luftwaffe pilots never wore their hair tied back in ponytails. When did men in New York City decide this was hip? Why did men in New York City decide this was hip? Why am I even writing about this when I could care less how anybody wears their hair? Simple—



it all comes back to you, the almighty reader. You and your demands. You want to know more about the Swans and their latest releases, their double-album *Children of God* and the *Love Will Tear Us Apart* 12" (both on Caroline Records, consumers). You want to know where the other members of the band are hiding—Jarboe, Norman Westberg, Algis Kizys, and this week's drummer, Virgil Moorefield. Beats me, okay? Gira's the leader, so we talked to him. Get off my back. Go read a book, do something constructive with your life, and don't waste your time worrying about the personal affairs of people who bend strings for a living! Get a life!!!

SONGS

Okay, okay, the interview. I'm going to reconstruct it here in present tense fake-dialogue form, for effect. It begins this way:

"We're going to be pretty big. We are," Gira says with a sharklike smile.

Oh, yeah? Well, maybe so. Any band that's written up in *People* is or will be big. *People* jointly reviewed one of the Swans' pre-*Children of God* exercises in audience abuse together with the last Howard Jones peefest as examples of, respectively, unrelenting pessimism and insufferable optimism.

"I don't consider us pessimistic at all. Not in the least. We're just writing songs and making music that I hope people can listen to and enjoy. It has implications, but that's really up to the listener. I don't color it too much."

So if the Swans aren't a pessimistic band, who is?

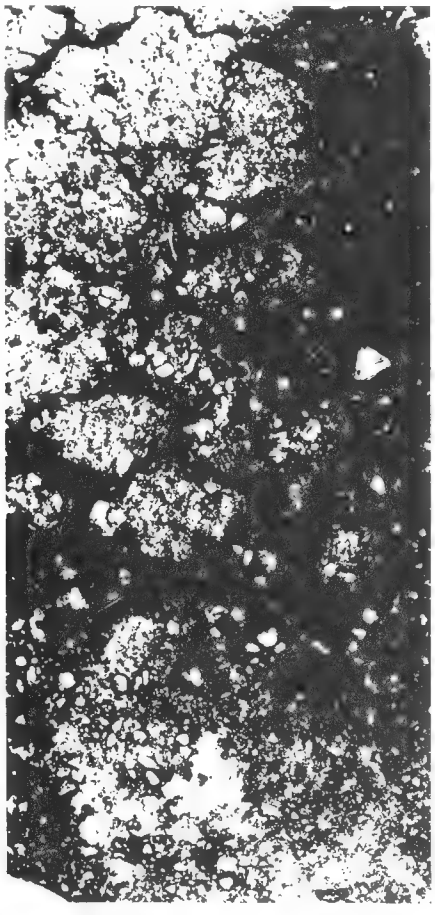
"Dire Straits, that's pretty pessimistic. I think there are some positive forces in music now, too—not necessarily great music, but positive forces—like REM and even U2. Even though

☞

they're kind of sentimental and a bit clichéd, they harken back to something human in music, rather than the typical overproduced, hook-every-bar kind of music. They've opened the door for a lot of people. It's a good sign that they're popular."

So let's talk about those wonderful, wonderful sonic textures you get on your records.

"We spend a lot of time finding sounds. But more and more we're concentrating on just simple song structures. If we can write songs that can be played on acoustic guitar and voice and stand up, that would be great. Everything else that can be put onto that just adds to it. In our past that wasn't really the issue, it was more building layers of sound, chunks of sound, or hard rythmns. I'm much more interested in just simple songs now. I've been listening to early Bob Dylan, and I identify with that. I think it's really important music in the sense that it means something in a human way. Johnny Cash or Willie Nelson, just simple vocal music, even some classical music. It's music that you can reduce to its simplest form, and it still means something."



Anyone ever tell you that parts of *Children of God* sound like Biblical movie soundtrack music?

Gira laughs. "It does have some of that in it. There's some pomposity and sort of grandiose moments—that's intentional. I watched *Ben Hur* as a kid. That record tries to produce the same sort of effect that I got when I was really young from records like *Umagumma, Electric Ladyland,* and some of the Doors albums, where it varies from a soft sensitive little ballad to a huge mammoth thing that could crush you. It's attempt to use some of the potential that's in rock music."

And has your audience been receptive to this?

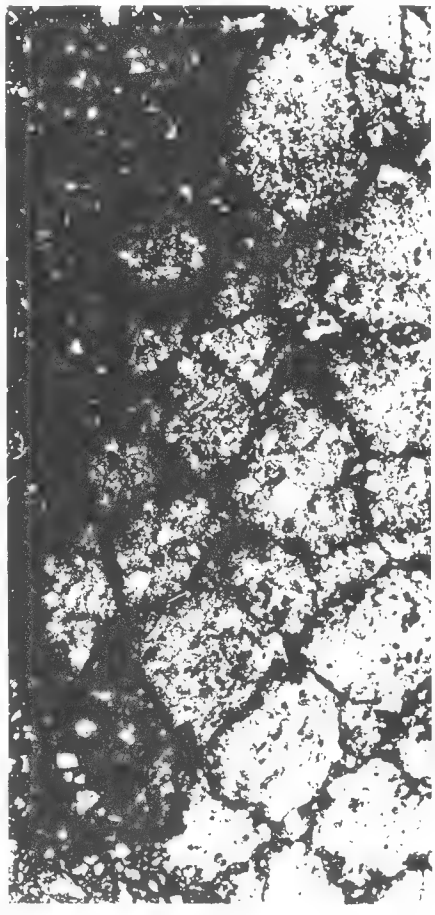
"A lot of critics have written 'hail to the crushing brutality of the Swans' reviews that disappoint me—it really doesn't have much to do with what we're doing now. The music is hard in a few places, but it's a lot more musical than it's ever been. The British press has tended to be very simplistic and stupid. They just assume that we can't change; they assume that we are what we once were."

Children of God reminds me quite a bit of the first Psychic TV album, *Force the Hand of Chance.* That record also combines hard sounds with soft ballads, includes some tongue-in-cheek bombast, and dwells on religious themes, too.

"Yeah, I've heard that record, I think. That's a good record. I've always liked Psychic TV—I admire Genesis P. Orridge quite a bit, especially his attitude towards music and his philosophy."

Speaking of philosophy, do you believe in God, or are you using the concept as a metaphor?

"That's not relevant, what I believe. I'd rather leave the songs as they stand and let people interpret that how they want. I don't think I'm proselytizing. I'm interested in the way that people lose themselves in something exterior to themselves and the way they define themselves and use belief systems to place themselves in the world. I just use that as a



loose kind of sign, not a metaphor, really. It's a way of getting at something. I watch Jimmy Swaggart a lot and I think he's great. I'm not necessarily advocating what he's saying, so much as I'm interested in the great response that his actions elicit."

Do you think the threat of divine retribution forces people to behave more ethically than they might without an enforced value system? (Can you believe I asked this question? Who did I think I was interviewing, Bertrand Russell?)

"I don't know; every society probably has some sort of ethical values to follow—you have to, really. I'm not anti-Christian, though. I think it's really simplistic to be anti-Christian. I mean, even if I was a Christian, it doesn't mean that I'd be in the Moral Majority or something."

Not every used car salesman is a crook. Not every politician has the morals of a snail. Not every girl named Bambi is an airhead.

"....I don't know that I believe in God or not. The world is so completely amorphous that I have no idea what's true. All of science could be a completely bogus lie. The Bible could be literally true. I don't know. I've been the reading the Bible, and it's really fascinating. It's an account of the way people decided to define themselves in order to be able to exist in the world. They needed a set of rules in order to establish how to behave."

So *Children of God* is a concept album on that theme?

"A lot of it has to do with belief and religion, but some of it doesn't. There are a few love songs on there. Some people don't take those seriously, because they think we're just kidding when we do those. Since we've previously been what they would call 'ugly,' they think we're just kidding now."

Sonic Youth got a lot of flak when they became interested in conventional song structure.

"They're actually selling a huge amount of records compared to what they used to because of it. I don't blame them. Most of what we call the avant-garde, the experimental, is totally bogus and worthless. It's basically a bourgeois concept of how to keep things interesting so you feel like you're advancing something. What's necessary in music is that you convey some human feeling. To me listening to Leo Kotke play guitar, or to Tom Waits, or to Bob Dylan is much more valuable than the newest sampling experiments. Fuck that."

What's your instrument, other than voice?

"I work out the basic songs on acoustic guitar, then I work with Norman, the guitarist, and Jarboe, too.

She writes melodies as well."

How did you get the variety of textures on the last album?

"There's a lot of sampling; there are some real strings and real oboe. We just added what seemed appropriate."

It seems appropriate to end this story right about now. Hail to the crushing brutality of the Swans. ■

LITHOGRAPH BY STEPHEN GIBSON

JEAN COCTEAU'S HEAD

that clever little Carmaig deForest.

by sydney carton

Carmaig deForest is a San Francisco-based songwriter who specializes in acid-dipped political barbs and angst-ridden personal confessions. Carmaig's ukelele has become the hook of many a press story, but his first album, I Shall Be Released *(on Good Foot Records), is a very electric affair, thanks in large part to the elegant lead playing of pop legend Alex Chilton, who also produced the record.*

What question are you asked the most? Something about your ukelele, I'll bet. **Yeah, I get asked about the ukelele** and how I hooked up with Alex Chilton, those are the two most common questions. The Chilton thing was through another record company. My relationship with that company soured, but the thing with Alex was solid. **The uke thing—**I'm kinda trying to downplay myself as a ukelele player. I was a directing major at UC-Santa Cruz doing experimental theater, and Spalding Gray came out and did a workshop one summer. He was getting directors to create their own performances, and he got me performing. So my whole senior year as a directing major I was really doing more performance art stuff. Once I was out in the real world, music interested me more. I knew how to play the ukelele, so I stuck with that and just went out there and did it. But the guitar is prominent on the album, and probably even more so live. The album documents me learning to work with a band.

Your songs deal with both politics and personal life—and sometimes mixtures of the two. **I started writing** about one-on-one relationships. The larger world-view stuff came later. Generally I try to write about an emotional truth, whether it involves something political or it involves something sexual or personal or whatever, it's writing about feelings rather than about objective reality. I don't try to be analytical about the situations. **Obviously I try to be clever** and have the words resonate, work on a way that kind of cuts deep, but I don't necessarily try to be rational or logical. People say, "I have trouble with 'Big Business' because you say 'I just want a little power'—are you talking about yourself or are you talking about business?" Well, I'm trying to get to emotional truth, I'm not trying to be politically correct. I guess "Crack's No Worse Than The Fascist Threat" is pretty analytical, but it's pretty direct, too. It doesn't mince words and I don't soften my blows. *A friend of mine says that crack IS worse than the fascist threat. She says it's destroyed her neighborhood.* **A lot of people believe that.** I mean, here I am, a white middle class kid...People who live in the projects in New York City who have crack dealers on four sides of them think the police should come in and knock down their doors without search warrants and just run them out of there. Obviously they're a lot more ravaged by crack than I'll ever be. But those people are most in danger of losing their basic rights. Poor people, minority groups—as fascism gets more entrenched, they're the ones most in trouble.

Your reviewers compare you to a lot of other people. **I can name them all—**Jonathan Richmond, Elvis Costello, Lou Reed, Billy Bragg, Loudon Wainwright III, Gordon Gano...Reed and Costello I can see, because they've definitely influenced my songwriting. I did a number of shows with the Violent Femmes, and their simple blues influenced me to try a few simpler songs. But I still haven't heard anything by Loudon Wainwright other than "Dead Skunk" and "Motel Blues," which Alex does a cover of. *Do you listen to X?* **I liked** their first album a lot, but I passed on most of their other records. I like their new album. *Well, the chorus of your song "Long Distance" sure sounds a lot like the chorus of "Your Phone's Off the Hook (But You're Not)" from X's first album.* **I nabbed that from X, yeah.** There's only so many good lines in songs, I figure it's okay to recycle.

FUNNY BOOK MESSIAH

Blessed is he who reads and blessed are they who listen to the words of the prophecy and who keep what is written in it. For the time is near.

— Revelations 1:3 (trans. by R. Lattimore)

STORY BY JAMES WU ART BY CHESTER BROWN

BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
BOOM
DON'T TOUCH IT! IT'LL TRY AND ATTACH ITSELF TO YOUR PENIS!!
YAGH!
BOP BOP
I WANT THAT CORPSE ENCASED IN CEMENT RIGHT AWAY!
CRUNCH
THE REST OF YOU FOLLOW ME!
MISTER PRESIDENT! WE'VE DISCOVERED ANOTHER DIMENSION!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN ANOTHER DIMENSION?
IT'S LIKE ANY OTHER WORLD
THIS IS ANOTHER DIMENSION!
DON'T SEE ANYTHING WHO'S HERE
WHY ARE YOU CONFUSED WITH THE TEXT YOU'RE READING?
HOW BLIND ARE YOU?
DON'T YOU REMEMBER? WHEN I BROKE THE FIVE LOAVES FOR THE FIVE THOUSAND HOW MANY BASKETS FULL WERE LEFT OVER?
AND THE SEVEN LOAVES FOR THE FOUR THOUSAND HOW MANY BASKETS OF BROKEN PIECES OF BREAD DID YOU PICK UP AFTER?
AND YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND?!

YUMMY...WHAT?

You consider yourself to be fairly worldly and sophisticated. You hear the phrase, "Yummy Fur," and you think of the fur bowl, you think of dada and surrealism, you think Man Ray and Dali and Breton. Well, you're right, but you're also wrong: *Yummy Fur* is a comic book. Not your quotidian, blue versus red, bang-slam-bash comic, nor your typical avant-garde, run-of-the-mill "cutting edge" black-and-white comic either. *Yummy Fur* is a miraculous, nerve-wrecking experience; don't even think of skimming it while you're standing in a crowded subway car. Your brain may not have enough blood flowing through it while you're in an upright position to cope with the scathing scatological humor of the book and you could develop an aneurysm and die.

Here's Chester Brown, *Yummy Fur*'s auteur, on the origins of the title: "I remember that Kris, the girl who pushed me into self-publishing my work, and I were walking around the city on a nice early summer day. I can't recall why we were walking around; we were browsing in record and book stores or something like that I guess, and I was trying to come up with a title to my comic and I just kept throwing all those title ideas at Kris and she kept coming up with reasons why each title was no good. So one of the titles I came up with was *Yummy Fur,* and Kris said, 'You can't call it that; people will think it's about sex.'

" 'Yeah...I guess you're right,' I answered. But after making up a couple more titles I went back to *Yummy Fur*. 'I don't care if people think it's a sex comic,' I declared.

" 'Well if you like it, use it,' Kris replied, being, no doubt, just tired of the whole question."

Briefly, this is *Yummy Fur*. Ed the Happy Clown, our protagonist, has been wrongfully jailed for the theft of a man's dismembered hand, freed by another man who can't stop shitting, severely beaten by a disaffected punk, befriended by a dead naked girl, subjected to torture and humiliation in the sewers where pygmies discover that Ed's penis can talk, shot by a mother-and-son vigilante team, and (as of the ninth issue) finds himself trapped in the "Adventures in Science" building with gun-toting homophobic doctors. You see, The Man Who Couldn't Stop couldn't stop because his bum was a dimensional gateway to a world where people haven't yet discovered the wonders of dumping solid human wastes into rivers and lakes—the government just piles the public's waste up on land and even in the streets. But then the Ronald Reagan of Dimension X learns of the otherworldly portal and immediately acts to dump all of the nation's excrement into this hole, which emerges in our dimension from the sphincter of the Man Who Couldn't Stop. Get it?

There's more: *Yummy Fur* also contains a serial adaption of the Gospel of Mark, six panels to the page, six pages per issue. Not only does it stomp the "Children's Illustrated Bible" version all hollow—it's almost a revelation in the way it soberly depicts a literal visual interpretation of Mark's verses, word by word. Brown even supplies helpful annotations and welcomes criticisms or corrections; he hopes to adapt the other three canonical Gospels once Mark is completed.

All this sounds like an exercise in obscurantism, but it's not. With an uncanny eye for detail and a quick wit, Brown churns out one of the most intelligent, disturbing and hilarious comics around, but that doesn't mean you won't get the jokes. The laughter evoked, however, will have a slight keening edge to it, like the cries of mortally wounded banshees.

CHESTER...WHO?

Soft-spoken Canadian Chester William David Brown was born on May 16, 1960. He studied commercial art at Dawson College in Montreal, Canada, until he decided he didn't want to be a commercial artist. In 1979, he dropped out and moved to Toronto and worked for a while at Galbraith Reproductions. Around this time he began spending his free time drawing comic strips—something he always wanted to do. (Realizing that this would take a lot of time and concentration, he chose not to purchase a television set. This alone demonstrates a singularly nail-gnashing courage.)

These early works first saw the light of day as mini-comics that Chester published himself in the summer of 1983. Seven digest-sized minis appeared on and off over the next two years, with an anthology published, again by Chester, in 1985. Then, after a very flattering review of *Yummy Fur* by Steve Monaco in The Comics Journal, Chester was formally approached by publisher Bill Marks of Vortex Comics, who was already a die-hard fan. The first three issues of the Vortex version reprinted the mini-comics, and Chester has been working up new material full-time ever since.

And no, that disaffected punk who beat up Ed the Happy Clown in issue five is not Brown's alter-ego. "A lot of people in the strip are me to varying degrees, and I suppose that character is me to some extent too, but it's best not to read too much into that. I mean, he's not supposed to be the main stand-in character for me, if you know what I mean, although I was thinking of using that character more, and making him a comic-book artist. But I've dropped that idea for the time being; maybe I'll come back to it, maybe I won't."

CLAWING TO THE TOP

Brown says he basically has free reign over the direction *Yummy Fur* takes each issue. "(Bill Marks) isn't even really an editor," he says. "The only time he ever said 'don't do this' was about the fourth issue—he didn't even say that, he said, 'I'd really rather that we didn't publish that panel (depicting a biblical character masturbating)'" after he had shown the panel to some local distributors. Upon learning of the objections, Brown redrew the offending panel so that a Xerox of the page in its entirety could still be made available to the public, providing they were over 21, since, ☞

apparently, younger readers can handle things like women getting knifed and people's hands getting cut off (events also depicted in *Yummy Fur*#4), but they can't handle something *really unnatural* that *doesn't happen every day*, like male ejaculation.

Today, Brown works on *Yummy Fur* (currently on a bimonthly schedule) to the exclusion of most outside projects, for fear of losing the exquisite narrative thread he's weaving; he has even turned down the opportunity to appear in *RAW*, the critic's darling of the alternative graphics scene.

"I don't think a store should carry* Yummy Fur *if it doesn't want to."

Brown says that thinking up a story idea outside of the current Ed the Happy Clown narrative or the Gospel of Mark would be too draining.

Be on the lookout sometime next year, though, for a "graphic novel"-format compendium of the current Ed the Happy Clown saga. "We've kind of been making plans for it, (but) the difficult part about it is knowing where to cut it off, you know? So we're trying to figure that out. Actually, the issue that I'm doing now, number 12, might be a good place, but then I said that a couple of issues ago. That's the problem: where do you draw the line as to where an (ongoing) graphic novel ends?" A compendium of Brown's adaption of Mark is also in the works, but may be delayed, if it proves too short, so that it can be combined with Matthew.

Brown sees comics as a lifelong occupation. "I just want to do comics," he says with convincing sincerity.

Unfortunately, *Yummy Fur* alone doesn't earn enough for him to pay the bills—as it is, Brown lives in one room of a rooming house—so he also works part-time for Andromeda, a comics distributor in Toronto, where he unpacks boxes of four-color gang wars between underaged mutant ninja pinup girls, as well as the odd box of GREEDs. Further proof of the injustice of the world.

REVELATIONS

Yummy Fur's content hints at its creator's intellectual curiosity. So what has the cartoonist been reading lately? "I really enjoyed Marian Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, (Joseph Heller's) *Catch-22*, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus* by Jane Schaberg, and *Music by Philip Glass*. I thought *The Last Years of Jesus Revealed* by C.F. Potter, *Saint Among the Hurons*, *The Life of Jean Se Brébeuf* by Francis X. Talbot and *Glen Gould, Music and Mind* by Geoffrey Payzant were okay. I hated, and didn't finish, Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation of Christ*, (Ruth Beebe Hill's) *Hanto Yo* and *The Messianic Legacy* by Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln—don't waste your money on that one."

As for music, Brown goes for "a lot of Philip Glass and Michael Nyman, and also some John Adams. Michael Nyman is best known for his brilliant scores for Peter Greenaway's films.

"As far as pop stuff goes, I like Peter Gabriel, old Genesis, Nina Hagen, Kate Bush, the Beatles, Talking Heads, Soft Cell, Indian pop music and David Bowie—even if he has been disappointing lately. But usually what I listen to is CBC Radio, because it's just kind of talk stuff, interviews, that sort of thing; it keeps me occupied while I'm drawing, although that's not supposed to be a good thing, because then you're not really concentrating on what you're doing, but....I just get so bored with just drawing, with nothing going on besides that."

METHODOLOGY

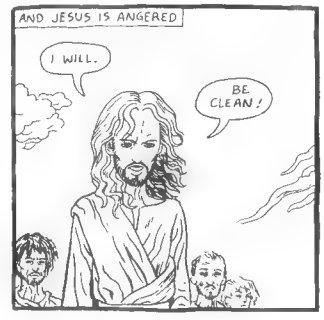
Okay, Chester, CBC Radio is on and you're at the drawing table. Now what? Do you have a draft of your story at hand? Do you wing it?

"It kind of varies. I have the story ideas in mind, usually, and then I script a few pages at a time in advance, writing out what the dialogue's going to be and then drawing them up. Other times, I already have a script done in advance. Sometimes I don't, sometimes I just make up the dialogue as I go along. But on an eight-panel page, I usually draw six panels a day no matter what else—and that's penciling, inking and lettering."

Due to *Yummy Fur*'s recent distribution difficulties (more on this later), some readers might not be aware that Brown has begun using an eight-panel layout instead of the six-panel page spread he used for the first seven issues. "I found with the six-panel page that I wasn't getting enough story," Brown explains, "like in issue six, where it's really evident that I had a longer story planned, but ran out of space. I've tried to pencil the whole issue and then ink it afterwards, but after it's all done, it feels kind of funny to do it all over again. I like to ink it while the panels are still fresh in my mind; it makes inking more of a chore if I have to do it all at once. The cover and the letters page are the last thing I do on each issue.

"(The letters page) takes about a day to do, I suppose. I sit down, take out and go over the letters that have come in over the last two months—I usually get a couple a week—and decide which are going to be best for the letters column. Then I letter them out." This means that the only things Brown doesn't do himself each issue are the ads and the indicia.

As far as inspirations go, the obvious ones are the members of the Funny Book Pantheon: Kirby, Ditko, Carl Barks, Will Eisner, Harold Gray, and John Stanley (the creator of Little Lulu). But Brown also enjoys some current stuff by the

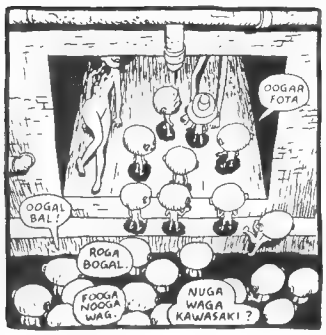


likes of Moebius, Don Simpson, Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez, Dave Sim, David Boswell, Charles Burns, Peter Bagge, Frank Miller, P. Craig Russell, "and anything by Alan Moore." Otherwise, "I read almost nothing from DC or Marvel that I can think of; I get the occasional thing, if it looks interesting," he says with perhaps a touch of sadness. Maybe Brown is depressed by the lack of anything substantial coming out of the two largest comic-book publishers in the US. Or maybe I'm just exaggerating.

PREZ-ON-A-STICK

One of the things people find very objectionable about *Yummy Fur* is the aforementioned talking penis. In fact, the head of Ed the Happy Clown's penis was simply replaced with the head of the Ronald Reagan of Dimension X—this happening due to that pesky dimensional portal.

Inspired as it is, you have to wonder how a man who has no television set was able to so accurately allegorize America's Commander-in-Chief. "As far as how Ronald Reagan looks, I just drew this head on the penis and said he was Ronald Reagan, and then when I did issue seven I had to have a body that went with it, so I was working backwards there." The Ronald Reagan of Dimension X looks to be about three feet tall, and that's in relative scale to the other members of his micro-dimension. The Nancy Reagan of Dimension X appears to be an 18-year-old slut.



"If I was going have a Ronald Reagan that looked different, I might as well have a Nancy Reagan that looked different," Brown reasons. "You know these comic books that have portrayals of public figures, but they kind of change the names a bit while keeping the people looking the same? It kind of bugged me, so I figured I'd go about it in a different way: have public figures who had the same names but looked different. It was kind of easier, too; I mean you don't have to actually have a picture of Ronald Reagan in front of you when you're drawing the comic then, you know?"

Shortly after these events in *Yummy Fur*, Diamond Distributors, a huge, vast, big (conservative, uptight, nervous) East Coast-based comic book peddler, dropped *Yummy Fur* from their roster, claiming poor sales. Rumors abounded that the sex and politics of the book were the real issue, given that the comics industry at the time feared a massive PMRC-type attack on adult comics was in the works. Outside of a few ludicrous TV reports and a blatantly unconstitutional arrest, the witch hunt never materialized (and if you vote for Dukakis this fall, maybe it never will). Diamond recently announced that it would carry *Yummy Fur* once again. (Since Diamond is showing the good taste of carrying GREED beginning with this issue, I'm sure that this *Yummy Fur* cutoff was simply some sort of zany mixed-up misunderstanding!—Your Profit-Minded Editor) Tell your local funny-book dealer that he should carry *Yummy Fur* and that you and all your little friends will buy multiple copies of each issue.

Brown has never claimed that *Yummy Fur* is a book for children and feels that dealers are well within their rights to protect children from the book, or maybe vice-versa. In Toronto, Brown says, comics with "offensive" material are simply placed in sealed plastic bags before being put on display—sort of like comic book condoms, keeping impressionable minds safe from that black-and-white mind fuck.

Further complicating matters is a conservative drive in Canada to pass Bill C-54, an "anti-porn" bill that leaves the definition of pornography open to just about anything that bugs anyone anywhere at any time. (Funny how fascists the world over tend to think alike, isn't it?) The bill is in trouble now (the conservative party is about to get booted out of power, so it has other things to worry about), but Brown says that "the fight continues. It looks unlikely that Bill C-54 will pass, but that still leaves this country with an awful obscenity law. It's still a dangerous time to be writing or drawing anything that might offend anyone and has sex in it. And even if C-54 doesn't pass in the near future, it will be back to bedevil us in a year or so, renumbered and slightly reworded."

"Mark's Christ seems to speak a lot to me, but maybe that's because I have to write down everything He said in those word balloons. Mark is the shortest Gospel."

SO

Yummy Fur epitomizes the ongoing struggle of (yes) Art against the rampant self-interests of heinous capitalism and the insidiousness of contemporary structures and mores. It is detailed but not overwrought, funny but not mindless, poignant but not pedantic, and deep but not heavy. You can help safeguard *Yummy Fur*'s future by making sure you buy out your local retailer every time you see an issue, so they'll be forced to up their orders; Brown really deserves your wholehearted support. He isn't simply on the cutting edge of comics—he is the edge. ■

This interview was conducted over the phone in two conversations five months apart. Brown also filled out details in correspondence.

A footnote: A neat little mini-sketchbook by CWDB is available from Edd Vick for .25¢ and a postage stamp. Send your request to Vick at 5014-D Roosevelt Way, N.E., Seattle, WA 98105.

DOG PHOTO BY JIM SAAH

READER SURVEY

In order to help our advertisers better understand the needs and wants of our readership, we ask you, the core of our market segment, to complete the demographic survey below. Send completed surveys to GREED, P.O. Box 39020, Washington, DC, 20016.

AGE
- ☐ Too damn young
- ☐ 'Twixt Teen and Twenty
- ☐ Under Thirty
- ☐ Don't Ask
- ☐ Really, Don't Ask

MY LANDLORD IS:
- ☐ A money-grubbing asshole
- ☐ A nosy money-grubbing asshole
- ☐ A sleazy money-grubbing asshole
- ☐ A psychotic money-grubbing asshole
- ☐ A nosy, sleazy, psychotic money-grubbing asshole

GIVEN HALF A CHANCE, I'D:
- ☐ Clear up this whole deficit mess
- ☐ Lick the sweat off Madonna's bare thighs
- ☐ Swindle widows out of their life savings
- ☐ Devote my life to helping the homeless
- ☐ Run naked through the sprinkler at midnight

DURING SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, I THINK ABOUT:
- ☐ My partner's orgasm
- ☐ Ferocious jungle beasts
- ☐ Bunnies and kittens and ice cream
- ☐ Baseball scores
- ☐ Killing myself

MUSICIANS GREED SHOULD INTERVIEW AND/OR SLOWLY DISMEMBER
- ☐ Morrissey
- ☐ Michelle Shocked
- ☐ The members of Love and Rockets
- ☐ Both of the Pet Shop Boys
- ☐ Everyone Responsible for Whitesnake

IS IT FAIR TO BLAME THE MAJORITY OF THE NATION'S PROBLEMS ON THE G.O.P.?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Sure
- ☐ Uh-huh
- ☐ You Bet
- ☐ Absolutely

CRUSHED UNDER THE IRON WEDGIE OF CAPITALISM

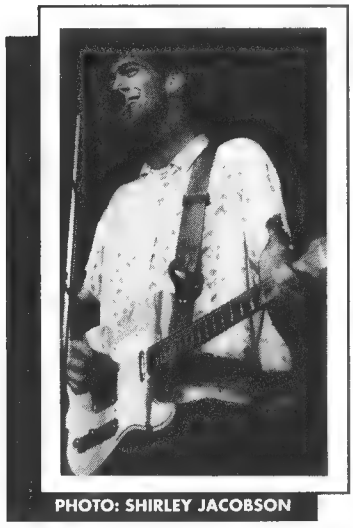


PHOTO: SHIRLEY JACOBSON

The Tommy Keene Story

AN INTERVIEW BY PETER HAYES

...Well, not really crushed, but certainly a little scuffed...

Tommy Keene is leaving home. It's Easter Sunday 1988. In two days he'll be touching down at LAX; in a week or so, settled in. In Washington, DC, the loss of the the city's One True Pop Star will be absorbed into the collective subconscious. Among his family, friends, and many enthusiastic local fans there is hope that he will one day return in triumph.

Keene has been a music fan since he was a very small boy, and his mastery of the pop music form shines through in his records. As a player and songwriter, he's most often grouped with Alex Chilton and Paul Westerberg, artists who create hard guitar-based pop-rock with smart lyrics. Keene's lengthy music business track record includes a stint with the Razz, a great DC band hopelessly at odds with the trends of its time. For the last several years, of course, he's fronted the Tommy Keene Band. The group was well-liked by audiences and critics and released a pile of records on independent labels, crowned by the classic *Places That Are Gone* ep on Dolphin Records. That record's success got the band the major label signing it had always sought. But, as Keene told *Matter* magazine in 1985 just after the signing, "I really want to be on a major label....Then again, dealing with majors, that's where your problems begin."

Just as Geffen Records released Keene's first album, *Songs From the Film*, a payola scandal blasted the record industry, throwing Geffen's perfectly-timed national launch of the album and first single off balance. Keene didn't get the Top 40 hit the record company was after, and rumor has it that things have been a little tense between Geffen and Keene ever since. Geffen released Keene's *Run Now* ep a few years ago, but since then Keene has been laying low. Last year the original Tommy Keene Band, which consisted of Keene, drummer Doug Tull, bassist Ted Nicely, and guitarist Billy Connelly, disbanded. Since then, Keene has laying low, writing songs and getting ready to record his next album.

On the porch at GREED Headquarters (Tommy's chosen location for this interview), spring is in the air. The child in me wants to dig out my skateboard and bolt in no particular direction. Down on the corner, the choices are simple: small or large fries? chocolate or strawberry shake? I guess when most of us grow up, we tend to blend into the fabric of things. I doubt that will happen to Tommy Keene, who, at a pivotal point in his career, realized he'd outgrown Washington.

MOVING DAY

GREED: What was the last official Tommy Keene Band show?

KEENE: We did this ridiculous college show for a fraternity. They told us it was an outdoor show, and we get to this place and it's this ranch house out in the middle of nowhere and they've got a couple of pieces of wood set down for a stage, and they didn't think about electricity—"Oh, do we need a generator or something?" There's sixty of these really preppie kids standing three hundred feet away by the kegs, and there we are playing in the middle of the field. A couple of the guys in the frat were record collectors and had all of our stuff, and they sort of arranged this, but everyone else was....well, it was kind of a funny ending.

GREED: What would have to happen in DC in the next 48 hours for you to change your mind and stay?

KEENE: Nothing musical is actually making me move; I just want to live somewhere else and see if I like it. There's a lot of things I like about Washington and a lot of things I don't; I've wrestled for two years with this decision and finally decided to do it. Now that the band's kind of fallen apart, I thought it might be easier to find people to play out there. It's kind of a different situation in that I'm in sort of a predicament—I'm now an "act," the solo act of Tommy Keene, and instead of getting a band together to see what happens I'll now hire people to go on the road. Which is a totally different situation from when the band started; people had more input into the songs as far as their individual parts. Everything came together on a group level, even though it was always labeled "Tommy Keene." Now I either have to find a new band and treat it like a band, or I have to just hire people. But the situation when you're on a major label is that you have to make a record, then do a tour, then make a record, then do a tour, so...I'm not moving out there for any great musical reason, although my manager's out there and the record company's out there. It will be good to get into the big pond.

GREED: I think there's more acceptance of the hard melodic pop that you play out there.

KEENE: I don't know. Heavy Metal's big out in LA now. But there's just a lot more people in general, a lot more bands playing every style of music. It could have its benefits. I think I'm going to do one more Tommy Keene record, then do something different.

GREED: Because you've got a lot of material...

KEENE: Yeah, or join a band or something. If the next Tommy Keene record does well I'll stick with what I'm doing for a while longer, but if it doesn't, I might do something else. I'm going to make another album, but whether the record company will promote it or do anything with it is always up in the air.

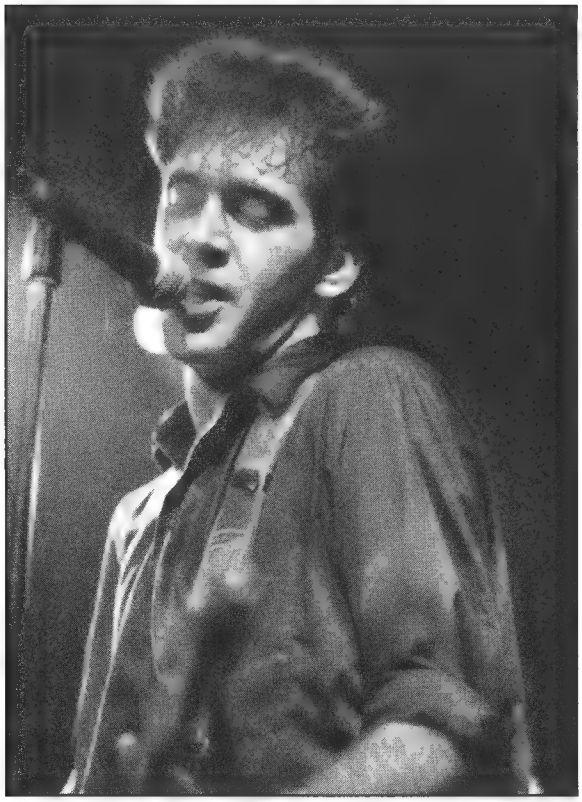


PHOTO COURTESY TED NICELY

GREED: That was the problem with Geffen?
KEENE: I think it's the problem with any label. It's a priority situation—they sign all of these bands and they release all of these records, and there's no way they can effectively promote and work each record to its logical outcome. They cover their bets by signing a whole bunch of stuff and just putting it out there and seeing what might take off, then they support whatever looks like a money-maker. But they don't know at the time when they sign you. It's such a long process—picking a producer and sort of developing the act, seeing how the act evolves and how the record turns out; so many personal, political, musical, business, and bureaucratic factors are involved. There's so much more behind it all than most people think.
GREED: It's not just making songs, arranging things and fine-tuning your sound; it's also hoping it's going to be promoted and financed—something that someone just starting out in a band might not consider.
KEENE: Exactly. Once you get to the edge and look over, you just say, "Oh, God..." When you first start a band you just concentrate on the music and work on things step-by-step. Can we get a gig here, can we put a record out locally, can we play in New York—and it goes all the way up to Lindsey Buckingham saying, "Will I win a Grammy for this?" I'm sort of in the middle of that process.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

GREED: Now that the Tommy Keene Band has, as you say, sort of fallen apart, has your approach to music changed since you're not in a performing band?
KEENE: I hate these long periods of inactivity—that's why I did solo shows last fall. I just have to get out there and keep visible. Everyone likes to take time off, but this has been ridiculous. In a way it's kind of holding me back, certainly as far as writing is concerned. The best thing to do is keep working, keep playing. That's where the problem comes in. You can't play around and do shows, especially local shows, when you're in this situation, because the progression of what you're doing is constantly judged. As soon as you're on a major label, you're treated differently. You have to do everything by the book, and if you don't, things appear different to the people who have their eye on you. From the local angle, as soon as you're on a major label you say, "We can't play the 9:30 Club (a DC venue that everyone hates but is basically the only game in town for groups playing to crowds under 400 people) every two months." The whole thing is to make everything an event. "We're a national act now, so we'll play twice a year."
GREED: And play the Bayou instead of the 9:30 Club.
KEENE: Well, the reason we played the Bayou was more of a political thing with the people at the 9:30 Club. It's a drag that the Bayou has a bad reputation—physically it's a good place, and it's certainly a lot more comfortable to play the Bayou than the 9:30 Club, although I'd rather play the 9:30 Club for esthetic reasons. Anyway, as I was saying before, if you play the 9:30 Club too often after signing to a major, people say, "He's not going anywhere." All of these factors come into play.

We never got to the level of drawing people into clubs that we could just constantly go out and play. It's important to have a record out at the same time to draw them in; you get the whole machinery working, the publicity department at Warner Bros. setting up interviews; you just get the whole thing going so there's a reason you're out there...

"I think I'm going to do one more Tommy Keene record, then do something different."

THE ABYSS GAZES ALSO

GREED: Did it get to the point that all those music business gears were moving smoothly?
KEENE: It did, when *Songs From the Film* came out. We were doing a song for a movie, we were in a movie....I had a couple of independent records out which got a lot of press, so when the first major label album came out, everyone was sort of anxious to hear what it sounded like. Whether they liked it or not, people wanted to ☞

write about *Songs From the Film*. I did about 300 interviews in the space of three months, just everywhere. We got a lot of press. *Spin* magazine, even though they hated it, put the album right between Elvis Costello's new record and the Rolling Stones' new record. And we were doing radio appearances, lots of promotion. I did lots of "listening parties"—promotional parties where I'd fly to, say, Seattle and they'd have a luncheon with retailers and press people and they'd play the album over and over. It's really kind of a sick thing; I was sort of on display. But that machinery was working. What should have happened is that at the right time we should have made the next record, then gone out on the road, then the machinery would have been in place and maybe we'd be further along the way—a little more interest, more fans. But Geffen has a reputation for over-tinkering with artists. There are so many discontented artists on Geffen...but who knows, maybe in the long run it won't matter. But, yeah, I am unhappy that I haven't been playing live and doing stuff.

"I'd say that the '70s so far as a decade are (musically) much better than the '80s."

THE JAWS OF DEATH

GREED: Wasn't there a payola scandal going on right as *Songs From the Film* came out? Did the timing become a problem?

KEENE: I think that it was. (The record company) now says that it wasn't, but when at the time they said "We're not releasing your single now because of all this," to me that says that either they used it as an excuse or, yes, the timing really screwed everything up. You see, they released a 12" of "Places That Are Gone" as a radio promo to all the AOR stations. Then they were supposed to release a 7" single to all the CHR stations (Contemporary Hits Radio—big big big Top 40 stations) as well as the AOR stations. So, when it came time a month and a half later after that whole scandal, they said, "We can't release 'Places' because we worked that record once and the stations that did play it feel they've taken it as far as it can go, and they won't play it again. And without that ground of support from the people that really like you, we're not going to go anywhere, so we have to come out with a different track." So they come out with "Listen to Me" and put that out as a single, then a week later when they got seven CHR station adds they said that it wasn't working so, zap, they pulled it.

The hardest thing, the thing that people don't realize, is that when you're Tommy Keene or Fetchin' Bones or anyone on a major label, you're competing with "Like A Virgin" and Diana Ross and Bruce Springsteen. It's scary when it gets down to that. If you want a Top 40 record, this is what's happening on the radio. Look at REM and "The One I Love"—I don't know how far that got, probably between 20 and 10, but it's difficult. A song like "Luka," which is the only thing that's sort of similar to what I'm doing, got to number three. So it's not impossible for something that's sort of organically rock-pop oriented. But let's face it, (hit radio) is either R&B, dance stuff, or heavy metal.

GREED: Do you think that REM is sort of forcing that open a bit?

KEENE: Well, REM now are huge, but I don't think you can use them as a judge. They are so unique. They're not a band that happened overnight; they just kept going and going, gathering fans all the time. They never had their ups and downs. They're the perfect example of a band that started at square one and went all the way up. No overnight success, just one straight line going up. Their next record will probably have a Top Ten hit; it will definitely sell a million records, and they'll be playing the Capitol Centre. From the 9:30 Club to the Capitol Centre. There was never a point in their career where they said, "God, what are we going to do now?" It was always sort of natural.

As far as REM opening the way for other bands, no, because all of the bands that sound like them would have happened in a similar way. I'm not really putting myself in that category, although I play guitar-based melodic music and I'm from DC, which some people consider the South.

MUSIC—BAD OR EVIL?

GREED: You've been into music since you were very young. What's the first rock and roll show you saw?

KEENE: Dave Clark Five in July '67. They were really on a downhill slide by then.

GREED: In the last issue of GREED, Sean O'Neill of That Petrol Emotion said that music today "has totally regressed; it's probably worse than it was before punk came along." I tend to disagree with that, because there was a lot of good stuff in the '70s, but it was underground, like the Stooges and Roxy Music...

KEENE: I'd say that the '70s so far as a decade are much better than the '80s. Even though there was a lot of bad stuff around then, I think there's much worse stuff around now. I can name you ten groups from the '70s who were incredible, and I can barely name maybe five from the '80s who I really like. Starting in the early '70s you had the Raspberries, Grin, Led Zeppelin, Roxy Music, David Bowie, Mott the Hoople, Iggy, Big Star, Lou Reed, then going on later, Television, Patti Smith, Talking Heads, even the Cars' first records. Now in the '80s there's REM, Echo and the Bunnymen, the Smiths...uhhm...

POP STAR HELL!

GREED: Is there a story behind your great cover of "Kill Your Sons" on Run Now?

KEENE: That was recorded in New York at The World, and it was taken from an MTV Saturday Night concert they did with us and Lloyd Cole, so the whole set was recorded. A lot of people taped it off of MTV, but it's not commercially available. It's really too bad—this is a typical record company thing. When we did that tour our regular drummer hurt his back, so we had to get a new drummer in a week. A guy from Geffen had flown me out to California about six months before that, because Berlin was looking for a guitar player. I asked if he was kidding. "No," he said, "they want to get someone different because they're going to use a lot of different people on the record." Berlin was down to a three-piece group, and they wanted different people with different styles, including people who didn't play what you might classify as Berlin's type of material. So this guy said, "I think you'd be great on a couple of songs." So I went out there not really expecting much—I said to their manager, "Are you sure you've heard my stuff?" Of course that didn't work out, but I met Rob from Berlin, who's a really great drummer, and when Doug Tull hurt his back I called Rob up and he was on a plane in a minute. He really liked my stuff and he was dying to do it. So the record company says, "We're going to have MTV film you and Lloyd at The World" on the second night of our tour with a new drummer. So we scrambled and booked some extra shows just to get some more shows under our belt.

The night before the MTV show we played in Boston with Lloyd Cole for the first time. In Boston we had a definite audience because we played there a lot—if there was anywhere we had a strong following outside of Washington, it was Boston and North Carolina. So of course we played and did really well, we got an encore, the audience response was great, and Lloyd Cole flipped out. He got nervous about having us along for the whole tour. So the next night we get to New York to The World, which had one dressing room. Lloyd said we couldn't use it. So we had no dressing room, we got a three-minute sound check an hour before the show, we were really tired, I had done a walk-on interview with MTV at 10:00 am followed by a *Rolling Stone* interview, and Lloyd's people were being really pricky—you name it. The show was recorded in 24-track, so it sounded good, but it could have sounded better if they had miked the stuff correctly. For instance, no backup vocals were even recorded. We were all pissed off but we just went out and did it. It wasn't a particularly good night.

GREED: Do you have other live recordings you might release?

KEENE: No, although I have live tapes of the band from the first show we ever did, at DC's Cellar Door, all the way to some shows last year.

GREED: When was that first show?

KEENE: August 18 1981.

GREED: And you had been in the Razz before that.

KEENE: And in between I went to New York and played with Suzanne Fellini and did sort of a tour of the Midwest, the East Coast, and Europe. We played a live show in Madrid and a lot of TV shows in Amsterdam and Germany and stuff. Then I was in a band in New York called Pieces, a power-pop band. We did about a million showcases for labels and got offered one really cheap deal that we turned down. I didn't get along with the other singer at all, and he was the main songwriter. The band fell apart and I came back here and did some demos, including "Strange Alliance," "The Heart," a version of "In Our Lives," and two other songs. Some of those songs came out on the compilation *Connected* that Skip Groff put out.

AN ELVIS STORY

GREED: You have to tell me the story of seeing Elvis onstage at the Capitol Centre two weeks before his death.

PHOTO COURTESY TED NICELY

KEENE: My dad had two tickets for one of his customers and they didn't go, so he gave them to me. It was an afternoon show, and the whole thing was unbelievably hokey. The production was cheap, the PA was terrible, and the place was full of rednecks. It was so weird that my friend wanted to go out to the car to get high, so he told the gate people he left something in his car and they said, "Oh, sure, you can come back in!" Not your usual Capitol Centre door policy.

At one point Elvis was telling jokes to the audience, and he did the splits—and in his condition he didn't get very close to the ground—but when Elvis did the splits, they played this really cheesy synthesizer effect that went "Weeeoooooooooooooo." And after he did that this guy behind us said, "Leave it to Elvis to come up with the latest contraptions!" Every fifteen minutes a guy would come up to the PA and say, "It's not too late to buy yer Elvis souvenirs, yer Elvis dolls, yer Elvis this, yer Elvis that." Then two weeks later Elvis died, which sort of made the whole thing worthwhile.

FIVE YEARS AHEAD OF MY TIME

GREED: When you were with the Razz, things were going off in a lot of directions for musicians. It seemed to me that Razz did things that were sort of in line with what was going on at the time, but they also had their own unique sound. Do you agree with that?

KEENE: Hmmmn. No. No! You know what I think of when I think back on Razz? I think of all the personal problems involved with that band before I even joined them, and while I was in the band—which was at the last period of the band—and then I think about why that ☞

band did not get noticed and signed to a major deal, why nothing ever happened. I think, "Well, if this person would have acted a little more like this," and "if this person would have done this," and if we maybe had played New York more, or met somebody who had more of a connection to an A&R person, which we never really did. Although every A&R person in the business, at least on the East Coast, saw the band and passed. But I think what was mainly going against the group was that what we were doing was very much not in vogue

PHOTO COURTESY TED NICELY

THE RAZZ, ANNOYING THE SYNTH-BAND CROWD

at the time. If that band had come along now, or two years ago, or a year from now, that band would be signed and would at least have a chance to live up to its potential. It was just the wrong musical climate. When I joined the band the whole New Wave thing was happening—not punk, but stuff like the Cars, Devo, Gary Numan. People did not want to hear a loud rock and roll guitar band at all; it was so uncool. We were snubbed by the whole downtown scene, the Urban Verbs crowd. We would play the Psychedelly (a now-defunct club in Bethesda, Maryland) to drunk suburbanites.

As big as the band was in DC, it would find itself continuously in situations it was not supposed to be in, but by default, because it was the biggest local band, it got booked on the show. Hence we opened for Devo at Gaston Hall. It was the fourth show of their first tour and they had every writer on the East Coast following them around—*New York Rocker, Village Voice, New York Times, Boston Rock*, everything—and we bombed so bad. We went on playing this loud rock and roll, and people didn't want to hear that. They thought it was retro; it sounded like Lynyrd Skynyrd or Blue Cheer to them. They wanted arty future music. That's the main reason that band didn't happen, besides personal problems and being in Washington. Razz was in the wrong place in the wrong time. Look at the Replacements—bands like that are so much like Razz with their cover songs and loud rock that still has its poppy elements. Look at the Georgia Satellites—Razz could have recorded their worst cover songs and still had a hit. Razz could have put out its version of "King Creole," the Elvis Presley song, and had a hit with it now.

TIN PAN ALLEY REVISITED

KEENE: One thing I noticed when I met and hung out with Paul Westerberg is that, personality-wise, he's very much like Michael Reidy.

GREED: Were you doing some work with Westerberg recently?

KEENE: We just got together once on the premise of writing songs, but nothing really came out of it. I've always liked the Replacements, and I know their manager. At one point we almost got signed to Twin/Tone. Anyway, I met him a couple of times and he came to see us when we played Minneapolis, and someone had the idea of us writing a song together, and he was really into it. His managers were saying, "He's never wanted to write a song with anyone." So we got together, but...I think he's the kind of person whose regular outgoing personality is very different from the frame of mind he gets into when he writes. When you sit down and write a song with someone, you really have to open up to them. I don't think he's the kind of person who really opens up to a lot of people. When he's in that sort of reflective songwriting mood, he has to be alone. It takes a certain chemistry to collaborate with people on songs. I got together with Jules Shear last summer and we just hit it off great, and we wrote five songs in six hours, which is probably pretty rare. Our personalities just clicked. One of those songs will probably go on the next record. We have one that's kind of a duet that I hope he can sing on.

THRASHING

GREED: You play a lot of leads while you're singing. Is that a burden to you—would you rather play rhthym guitar and have somebody else handle that?

KEENE: No, I really like playing guitar. A lot of people are really surprised when they see us live to find that I play all the leads, because usually singer/songwriters just bash away at the rhythm guitar while they play. Of course, Springsteen plays a lot of parts.

GREED: You aren't planning any big surprises with your new material, are you? You're going to stick to a guitar-oriented sound?

KEENE: A couple of songs on the new record will have keyboards—not actually keyboards, but one song has cellos that we can sort of play through the keyboard. I'm thinking of getting a keyboard player to play live. Or, ideally, to get a guitar player who can also play keyboard. Everyone always asks, "why can't you make a record that sounds the way you do live?" Well, it's tough to do. A lot of it's attitude, but most of it's production and sound and recording. The studio can be pretty inhibiting.

(Special thanks to Tommy for granting this interview despite his hectic moving schedule.) ■

Dag Nasty

WHAT'S BEHIND THE BIG GRINS?

DAG NASTY, TOM CRUISE, PATRICK SWAYZE: THEY DARE YOU TO RESIST THEM.

The leading men of 1988 are cocky, mischievous and not afraid of strong women.

This is the year of the grinners: Dennis Quaid, Tom Cruise, Brian Baker, Doug Carrion, Scott Garrett, and Peter Cortner.

Quaid and Cruise are movie stars. One can act and one can't; guess who's more bankable?

The other guys are in the band Dag Nasty, which due to several rapid changes in personnel and musical direction is really two bands in one. The first Dag Nasty was former Minor Threat guitarist Brian Baker's successful attempt to sell hardcore hamburger to the steak-craving masses (immortalized on Dischord's *Can I Say* lp and about half of the follow-up, *Wig Out at Denkos*); the second Dag is a genre-free rock and roll band trying hard to produce good, hard-edged pop rock (as heard on *Field Day*, the band's new album on Giant Records). Guess which Dag's more bankable? At the time of this interview, conducted just after *Field Day* hit the racks, the answer seemed to be "the one that sucked." A month or two later, though, and the situation has changed quite a bit: over 20,000 copies of *Field Day* have been sold so far, a very respectable sum for an indie-label release. This probably comes as quite a relief to the band, as the melodicism and pop hooks running through *Field Day* alienated by-the-numbers punks, the band's well-targetted market in days gone by.

The irony of this situation is not lost on Peter Cortner, Dag Nasty's amiable lead singer. According to Cortner, the band has had to contend with throngs of puzzled pubescent punks across America, many of whom take the "I paid my cash—I want my thrash!" position. (Ex-Minor Threat vocalist Ian MacKaye faced similar problems when his band Fugazi toured America this summer.)

"Our traditional stronghold of popularity was the Northeast," Cortner says. "Anywhere between DC and Boston we're usually guaranteed sold-out shows, a real punkfest. The last time we went out we were still playing a lot of old material, so at least 50 percent of the whole set would be thrash. I didn't realize it at the time, but during the last tour our "image" fit in with a lot of other punk bands—what we in the band called "jockcore." Everyone in the band was wearing sweats, and everyone had short hair except for Brian; mine was bleached blonde. I think playing a lot of thrash and looking like we did had a lot to do with the reason now when we're going up there, we're not getting as many people, and a lot of people are very disappointed because we're not playing any thrash on this tour. We really want to concentrate on our new material, because we wrote it all in the studio and we'd like to make it work live. We've only done two shows in that area so far, playing in Albany and at the Anthrax in Connecticut, and at both shows a lot of people told us how dissatisfied they were with the new record, how they consider it to be an anti-*Can I Say* record: They're holding that against us, which I think is very interesting."

So how does the band feel about the new album? ☞

"*Field Day* is a complete mystery to us," Cortner explains. "It was not really what we expected, although we are happy with it. But the one thing we did have in common is that we felt that instead of trying to make an attempt to appeal to any particular audience, which I think the *Can I Say* record in particular is a good example of, we decided to assume that we four represent enough of the population that if we were to make a record for ourselves, it could find an audience. So the attitude here was to just do what we do, enjoy what we record, and not worry about what our market is."

The band's decision to place art above commerce comes even more as a surprise given founder Brian Baker's oft-stated desire to climb up on the pedestal of rock superstardom, right next to Mark Farner, Rick Derringer and Peter Tork.

"If Brian wanted to be a star, this definitely would not be the vehicle for it," Cortner argues. "This band is not the Brian Baker Experience. Brian is commonly considered the "chief Nasty," which is really not true. It's very much a group effort. I think if Brian were to go off and do his own thing, it would either sound very much like the first record or it would sound like the new Cult."

Cortner concedes the band's "commercial punk" origins. "The first record is a great hardcore record, but as far as the 'meaning' and 'truth' that most of the punk scene gets out of it—I think that's really funny, because if ever there was a case of people trying to cater to the tastes of a certain audience in order to get their record sold, that's it. You have your ex-Minor Threat guy, you have your ex-DYS, you have your hardcore tunes, you have vague lyrics that basically point to being angry with society and parents...." When Cortner joined the band (just prior to the *Wig Out* album) he took over the majority of the lyric-writing, a contributing factor to the improvements on *Field Day*.

"I told him about my weight problems, my operations and being a virgin. I was sure I'd never see him again. But I was wrong."

"I don't consider myself to be much of a songwriter. None of it's poetry, but for as sappy as much of it is—and a lot of it is sappy, very on the surface—it is honest, and I'm not afraid to be sappy as long as it's something I can honestly say."

One odd thing about the new album is that Baker's dynamic guitar playing is not very prominent in the mix. "Yeah, I don't know if that's for the good or for the bad. We produced it ourselves on 16-track, and so we had the limitations of that. In some cases I think having the guitar down was a good idea, in other songs I wish it was louder. But you'll feel that way about any album in retrospect. I think for the type of stuff we want to do it would be a good idea if we got a decent producer."

And speaking of different sounds, a few months before *Field Day* was released Dag Nasty put out a single called "You're Mine." Cortner tells the tale: "When it was written, 'You're Mine' was supposed to have a Gang of Four-meets-Clash texture to it. It was the first song that we wrote with our new drummer, and he is so much more capable than anyone we've worked with before that anything he played would sound amazing to us. He was just playing this very straight beat and we said 'Wow, that's great!' We ended up writing this three-chord song that we wanted a very rough-edged sound for. Then we went in and spent $3,000 recording this single...and it sounded like Bon Jovi. We make it a point not even to rehearse that song. We don't play it; we don't like it. But at a few places we've gotten yelled at by the crowd until we came back to play 'You're Mine." In other places, if we played that song the room would empty. I'm into the idea of recording singles that push the limit of what the band can do, whether it fits into what the band's supposed sound is or not."

And speaking of crowds, Cortner says Dag Nasty's long tours have taught him not to make assumptions about punks. "Every time I develop a stereotype of what the punk attitude is now and what age punks are, I'll go to a different town and meet people who just blow that out of the water. In Columbus, Ohio when the PA went out during "The Ambulance Song" from the new record, all the punk kids were singing along, swaying back and forth. Losing the PA didn't phase them in the least. In some places they're very strict about what they listen to, but in other places maybe they like to shave their heads and fuck up their parents' minds a little bit, but they're definitely not limiting themselves, at least not musically."

It remains to be seen how Dag Nasty will fare now that the band has decided not to limit *itself* musically.

"I personally find it really interesting to hear about the two sides that are dumping on us, but it makes absolutely no difference to us. Making any kind of reaction at all is great in itself; whether it's good or bad is of no importance, it's just the existence of a reaction. The rest of the band is interested in making a big success, and while I have no problem with making lots of money, to me personally just the idea of having a band is great, whatever happens, even if we totally nosedive after this tour. And if we don't nosedive we'll have the chance to put out some decent records. We're definitely still learning to work with each other, and it's going to take a lot of effort to put out more good music. A lot of hurdles have to be jumped." ■

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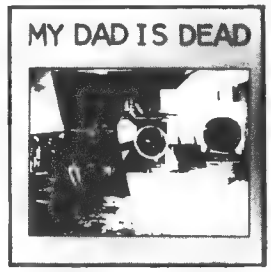

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THE FIRE OF LOVE (&ROCKETS)

Love and Rockets is the comic book most read by people who don't read comic books. That makes a certain amount of sense, in that the publication bears little resemblance to mainstream American funnybooks—it's black and white, magazine-sized, deals with subject matter never tackled before in the comics format, emphasizes characterization, features no superheroes (a few popped up in the beginning, mostly as figures of fun, but they've vanished of late), and draws its inspiration not from the pulp adventure novels of the 1930s, but from such diverse sources as the punk subculture and Latin American literature. The most important difference, though, is that *Love and Rockets* succeeds both as entertainment and as art. Although the magazine remains steadfastly unpretentious, its consistent high quality is doing

much to redeem what has often rightly been viewed as a junk medium.

That this was accomplished by outsiders to the comic book industry is not particularly surprising; that the gifted outsiders in question were, at the time the magazine started, young Hispanic punk rockers living in the barrio of Oxnard, California, is a bit more noteworthy. When the magazine first appeared in comic book specialty shops, reaction was mixed; for some the book was a revelation that changed their lives, but for rank-and-file comic book readers, conditioned over the years to venerate mediocrity and conformism, the magazine was a frightening telex from Dimension X, full of images from alien cultures. Now that *Love and Rockets* has been critically acclaimed and demonstrated its staying power, it's become "collectible." So the same vermin that decried the book when it first appeared are now paying $100 a ☞

LOS BROTHERS HERNANDEZ

TEARS FROM OXNARD

STORY: KURT SAYENGA

ART: ©1988 GILBERT AND JAIME HERNANDEZ

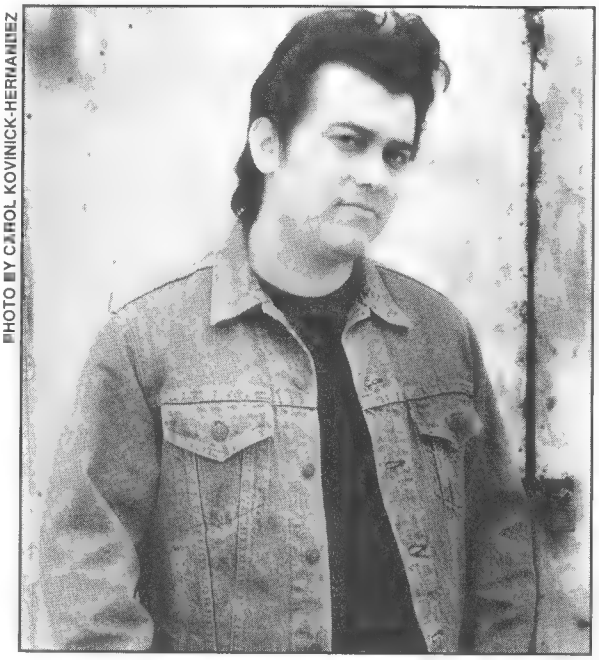

PHOTO BY CAROL KOVINICK-HERNANDEZ

GILBERT HERNANDEZ: "WE HAVE TO BE ABLE TO MAKE OUR CHARACTERS LOOK BAD. IF THEY LOOK BAD, SO WHAT? I'M NOT PUTTING TOGETHER CHARACTERS DESIGNED TO BE LIKED. AT FIRST I THOUGHT THAT MIGHT BE NECESSARY, BUT NOW I DON'T FEEL THAT WAY AT ALL."

pop for early back issues.

Since 1982, *Love and Rockets* has been the bimonthly forum for the work of Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez. In "Mechanics" and "Locas," Jaime chronicles the low-rent adventures of the sweet, perpetually moonstruck Maggie and her girlfriend Hopey, a short, bitchy, bass-playing ball of fire who's practically an underground archetype—anyone who's ever been part of the punk community knows someone like Hopey or *is* someone like Hopey. The majority of Gilbert's time in recent years has been spent writing and drawing "Heartbreak Soup," a chronicle of the mythical small South American town of Palomar and the lives of its inhabitants. In "Heartbreak Soup," Gilbert has created the most fully-realized cast of characters in comics history.

Gilbert is the better writer of the two and Jaime the better artist, but in their case such rankings are relative; they're both far ahead of anyone else in the field, and their artwork perfectly complements their stories. Just as cinema critics celebrate "pure film"—that which is uniquely cinematic, an effect that cannot be accomplished in any other medium—so admirers of *Love and Rockets* champion the magazine as "pure comics." The Hernandez brothers turn black and white lines into emotion. Their work can make you laugh, cry, throw a chair through a window, question your moral and ethical standards, or get up the nerve to burn your power suit and dress the way you want to dress.

IT CAME FROM OXNARD

So where do these Hernandez guys come from? What's their deal? WHO SENT THEM AND WHY????

They're two members of a brood of six children, all of whom were encouraged to draw by their mother. Before the magazine began, the brothers were busy leading lives of quiet desperation. "I was unemployed for the longest time before *Love and Rockets* came along," Gilbert remembers, "making a bit of money here and there, doing odd jobs and things. I could just never see myself in a nine-to-five job. Jaime had a part-time job as a janitor in a nursery school. We had been drawing comic strips, more or less at the same time, for ourselves for years. They were a bit more crude. But all this material was accumulating and our older brother Mario decided, well, let's give it a try, just publish it ourselves. We were going in with the attitude of the '70s when kids used to publish their fanzines for $1.25 or whatever. We were really naive about it. We just put it together and printed about 800." The self-published first edition of *Love and Rockets* now sells for slightly more than a 1977 Triumph TR-7 with 80,000 miles on the odometer.

With the optimism of youth, the three brothers (for Mario also contributed comics at the outset) sent their fanzine to the *Comics Journal*, a magazine that attempts to apply the critical standards of literature and fine art to comics (and consequently finds just about everything lacking). Gilbert figured "if we could take their criticism, we could take anything." But as it happened, *Journal* publisher Gary Groth immediately recognized the depth of the brothers' talent. Groth, who planned to expand the publishing activities of his company, Fantagraphics Books, offered the brothers their own regular showcase, promising them complete creative freedom and ownership of their stories and characters—concessions that the major comic book publishers, Marvel and DC, even today won't grant their most popular artists and writers.

Groth's decision to publish the brothers' work was especially fortunate when one considers what could have happened to Gilbert and Jaime had they not been given the chance to follow their creative instincts. Gilbert's "Heartbreak Soup" would never have existed, and who knows where or when he would have obtained a regular forum for his decidedly mature, realistic vision (maturity and realism being at the bottom of the list of things greedy comics publishers look for in a "product"). And imagine Jaime's delightful artwork corrupted by the Marvel Machine: "If they would have caught me in time, I would have been nothing right now—no thinking, no ideas. If I was doing that stuff and I tried to break out from it, I don't think I'd lose that Marvel quality....We're lucky that people are buying our comic. We're able to do what we started out to do, and we haven't had to compromise."

Groth says that although *Love and Rockets* was pretty much ignored at first, perhaps due to its unorthodox format and content, it eventually "helped legitimize black and white comics in the minds of the more commercially-minded. It did take a while to catch on. I think we only printed about 4,000 copies of the first issue. Then it might even have gone down a bit for the next one or two, then it started going up." As of issue 27, circulation is now up to 20,000. Additional sales have come from four magazine-sized, 126-page reprint books targeted toward the comic shop market, as well as two trade paperback collections distributed by Berkeley to the nation's bookstores. The bookstore experiment, Groth says, "is going over real well....I would assume that most of the people that

buy the Jaime and Gilbert books at the bookstore are non-comics-reading people, people who mainly see comics in newspapers and who remember comic books but don't frequent comic book shops. And that's what we're trying to do—convert reasonably literate adults into reading more sophisticated comics." Two more bookstore editions are due out soon, and Groth believes that the first two books will go back to press at the end of the year.

The proceeds from the reprint books and increased magazine sales have improved the brothers' historically lousy financial situation. Jaime has moved into his own Oxnard bachelor pad, and Gilbert recently married and moved to the suburbs of Los Angeles. "I'm surprised *Love and Rockets* is still a hip thing," Jaime claims, "because you know how long 'hot' lasts. One thing that helps is that a lot of our readers are non-comics people. They don't give a shit if it's not color or comics-size."

That *Love and Rockets* had the opportunity to crawl out of the comics ghetto into Waldenbooks is a tribute to Art Spiegelman's groundbreaking comics novel *Maus*, the first half of which appeared in a 1986 softcover collection that sold well and garnered critical raves from newspapers and intellectual journals alike. "*Love and Rockets* has gotten its fair share of publicity and good reviews," Groth says, "but nothing quite like *Maus*, in my opinion because *Maus* has the Holocaust as the hook. I'm not saying Spiegelman used it as a gimmick, but it turned out sort of after-the-fact to be an exceptionally good media hook. Neither one of the Bros has anything of that promotional calibre. Jaime and Gilbert's work is a little more difficult to categorize, especially Gilbert's, I suppose."

The brothers' work has piqued the interest of film-makers, who, as cartoonist Peter Bagge mentioned in the pages of GREED #4, like to hide little clauses in contracts that would result in the brothers losing the rights to their creations.

"A couple of people have been really honest," Jaime reports, "but they didn't have any backup money so it didn't get anywhere, and then there's been people who have heard that *Love and Rockets* is this hot thing and they call and say, 'Well, I've never read it, but I'm sure we could do something...'" And sometimes, both brothers lament, the would-be adapters are well-meaning but not very talented. After saying "no" for years, the calls have slacked off.

"It's funny that all these Latino movies are coming out now," Gilbert says. "It started with *La Bamba*, and now there's *Salsa*, *The Milagro Beanfield War*, *Stand and Deliver*, and Jane Fonda's producing one called *The Old Gringo*. So any day now we should be getting phone calls again."

Gilbert says he and Jaime aren't opposed to creating an original work for film or even for other publishers, "but they always want the book. There was a time when I was short on money and I wanted to do a mini-series for another small company, but they weren't interested. They don't want me or Jaime, they want *Love and Rockets*, which is really strange, because *we* are *Love and Rockets*. They want us to do a *Love and Rockets* full-color comic, but they don't understand that *anything* we do is *Love and Rockets*."

HIYA FROM HOPPERS 13

Jaime is the first and still the only person working in any artistic medium to accurately portray the flavor of life in the punk subculture. That Jaime's work is popular with so many readers, including those who have no idea what the punk scene is (or was) about, is a tribute to the quality of his storytelling. Then again, the lesson of both brothers' work is that human nature remains constant regardless of environment—whenever and wherever girls and boys get together, there's going to be trouble. (This can, in fact, be reduced to a more existentialist equation—wherever there's a human being, there's going to be trouble.)

PHOTO BY CAROL KOVINICK-HERNANDEZ

JAIME HERNANDEZ: "I LIKE SHOWING PEOPLE HOW IT'S REALLY DONE—SHOWING WHAT THE PUNK SCENE IS REALLY LIKE FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCES, AND SHOWING PEOPLE MEXICAN CULTURE. IT'S WHAT I KNOW, AND A LOT OF PEOPLE DON'T KNOW IT."

Jaime is now 29 years old (Bert is 31), old enough to have taken part in the original punk explosion in the late-'70s but young enough to have been around during the subsequent rise and fall of hardcore, as well. Consequently he's old enough to see how time has changed the scene—it's gotten bigger and dumber, the music has hardened arteries, and the haircuts and clothes that used to get you in fistfights even two years ago are now popping up in junior high schools across America—but he still feels affection for it. Nostalgia for the early days shows through in Jaime's flashbacks, particularly in the long series that traced the beginning of Maggie and Hopey's relationship; Gilbert has also written a bittersweet story about the Good Old Days of '77 and '78.

The brothers' generally favorable portrayal of the punk scene is particularly welcome given the android images of "hip youth culture" being spread by the mass media in book/films such as *Bright Lights, Big City* and *Less Than Zero*, which basically support the oldster argument that Youth Today Is No Damn Good and the only legitimate alternative ☞

subculture was all that hippie crap back in the Sixties.

"I've always hated that lifestyle—the cool kids with the money," Jaime snarls. "One thing that pisses me off about all these movies like *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* is that all the good guys are smarter than the grownups, and they've all got the snappy answer. They're never at a loss for words. And if there is a bad guy, he's an evil person who should go to hell. And if there's someone who's fat or wears glasses, he's a dork and he loses. Or maybe they let him win at the end, so he gets the girl and they call it *Revenge of the Nerds*. Everyone's so snappy and so hip; they've always got It. I hate that shit, and that's why I try to give you the good and the bad in every character. The main characters are embarrassed, and the bad guys aren't always so bad. You need that balance or else...or else you make a lot of money."

Jaime has playfully included references to bands such as the Teen Idles, X-Ray Spex, Minor Threat, X, the Germs and many, many others in the backgrounds of his drawings, and for several years he's chronicled the ups-and-downs of Hopey's not-so-great band La Llorona. Jaime's recent depiction of La Llorona's "US tour" showed just what a frustrating, grubby, starvation-filled experience tours really are for anyone but Top-40 acts and glam metal bands (such as Bon Jovi, a band that makes more money writing songs about the LIVING HELL of life on the road than the United States Government spent on AIDS research last year).

"I have a brother who was in the band Dr. Know, and they went on about three or four cross-country tours," Jaime explains. "The first one was really successful, but the more they went the more screwed up things got. And I just added my own stuff to what he went through." Jaime and Gilbert have both spent time in bands—Jaime plays bass, Gilbert guitar—and they've now joined forces in the obnoxiously-named Nature Boy. Gilbert's wife Carol is the new band's bass player, so Jaime has switched to drums. "We're really on the starting stages, so don't ask us what songs we do," Jaime says. "We're still looking for a place to practice."

FROM "HUMAN DIASTROPHISM:"
LUBA AND HER CHILDREN IN A RARE HAPPY MOMENT

Jaime's depiction of life in Hoppers 13, a barrio in an unnamed California city, is just as acute as his vision of the punk scene. Which brings up the question: Is Hoppers 13 more or less Oxnard, California?

"Oh, sure," Jaime says. "It's like every town from San Francisco to San Diego. There's a big, big Hispanic population here, and every place has its little barrio. Oxnard is surrounded by beaches. When I meet people they'll say 'You're from California—what part?' and I'll say Oxnard. 'Oh, I have a boat in Oxnard!' We're surrounded by fancy marinas and boatyards for the rich people. They don't know about us poor people inland. They never hear about it."

The robots and rocketships Jaime's heroine Maggie repairs in the outside world never turn up when she's at home in the barrio—which is most of the time, as she quit her mechanic job several issues back. A good thing, too, because by keeping Maggie's two worlds separate Jaime has been able to depict in very realistic fashion a culture rarely seen by Anglo-America. "I kind of like showing people how it's really done—showing what the punk scene is really like from my own experiences, and showing people Mexican-American culture. It's what I know, and a lot of people don't know it."

A fine example of this is Jaime's recent story "The Death of Speedy Ortiz," which chronicles the chain of events leading up to the demise of Maggie's longtime friend and object of desire. Speedy, who has appeared in Jaime's stories since the very first *Love and Rockets*, falls victim to his own self-destructive tendencies and promiscuity, but not before he kicks up a storm that results in a gang war, shootings, beatings, and a lot of pain for everyone all around. The machismo and violence depicted in the story, Jaime says, "is a way of life here." Loyalty to friends is valued, but even more important is loyalty to family. "That's the thing around here in the barrio—if you're related to someone it's blood, man, they'll stick up for blood. If I was about to get beat up, but someone said, 'Hey, aren't you my cousin?' and I said yeah, I am, they'd say, 'Don't fuck with him, he's cool, he's my cousin!'"

The depth of detail in the "Death of Speedy" is an eye-opener—Jaime's observations of human behavior and social rites are by turns cutting and touching. "There was a lot of stuff I left out, though, for space," Jaime demurs. "I could have really gone for it in the story but, oh well..." No apologies are necessary. The swirl of events that lead to the story's tragic conclusion—a tired and confused Maggie rejects Speedy when, unknown to her, he's in a suicidal spin—are believable and moving. After he's found dead in his car—whether he's

killed himself or has been murdered is left to the reader to decide—Speedy clasps the hand of a friend wounded in gang warfare, then says goodbye to his sister Izzy. A little magic realism goes a long way when it's used correctly.

After a little prodding, Jaime admits that he's pleased with the story, too. "That was kind of a rare thing, because for once I knew exactly how a story was going to end. I went through the third part really fast, because I knew what I was doing for once." Usually Jaime has a general idea of where he's going, but it's not tightly plotted out. "The story that started in issue 26 is about Maggie going on the road with her wrestling act, playing the aunt's partner/assistant. I'm finishing the second part now, but I have no idea how it's going to end. I've thrown out eight endings so far. This is one case where I'm just doing it as I go along."

As time goes on, Jaime's confidence in his abilities increases; now he's taking more risks with his material. Killing Speedy Ortiz was one such move; splitting up Hopey and Maggie, whose relationship forms the core of the strip, is another. (Hopey could have taken Maggie on the band's tour, but didn't, and now she's broke and stranded in Middle America.) Although the breakup is probably temporary—"I can't keep them apart for too long," Jaime says—another very controversial development is here to stay: Maggie's weight gain.

When *Love and Rockets* began, Maggie was slim and cute as a button, although she complained a lot about the size of her butt. After Maggie left her mechanic job she grew depressed, ate everything in sight and put on pounds. This is the kind of thing that happens all the time in "real life," of course, but it's practically unprecedented in comics, where the idealized comic babe archetype rules over a million adolescent Ids. The "new" Maggie is still attractive; she's just, well, a little chunkier, and her more realistic proportions mirror the increasing realism in Jaime's stories.

"She's going to stay fat as long as I can do it," Jaime says emphatically. "It's really comfortable for me to draw her this way—it's like I've finally found the real Maggie. I get interesting feedback—just about as many female readers as male readers tell me to get her skinny again, but for some reason the male readers demand it. The female readers just wish I'd stop it, but the male readers say 'How could you DO this?'"

It's rather ironic that readers were more upset by Maggie putting on pounds than Jaime's decision to bring the girls out of the closet. That Maggie and Hopey were in love was a given; that they were lovers was implied, but never confirmed. Jaime finally "revealed the truth" in a very matter-of-fact, unsensationalized way. "It was just one thing that I was kind of keeping a secret, and I didn't want any kind of secrets in *Love and Rockets* where people would be waiting for something big to happen. I just wanted it to be there, as easy for the reader and it was for them, just a natural thing." Some readers were probably surprised, as Maggie has constantly fallen in love and in bed with men since the strip began. But the very fact that Hopey sometimes even helps Maggie go after a guy is a key

MAGGIE IN HER PIN-UP GIRL DAYS, AND AS SHE'S CURRENTLY DRAWN. MAGGIE'S WEIGHT WENT UP AS JAIME'S "LOCAS" TOOK A TURN TOWARD REALISM

to their relationship—Hopey puts up with Maggie's crushes because she's crazy about Maggie, just as Maggie tolerates Hopey's searing bitchiness.

Another unusual aspect of the *Love and Rockets* phenomenon is the book's popularity with women, who traditionally are not readers of comic books. Female readers are quick to praise Jaime and Gilbert's skill at creating realistic female characters. A few years ago Jaime was asked to explain how he came to possess such insight into female characters. He responded, "That's the only question I can never answer. I just do it; no trick. It just comes out on paper."

When asked if he has an answer to the question now, Jaime says, "I guess it's just being observant. If I'm successful at it, then all I can say is it's not that hard. It just happened." Perhaps it's because Jaime respects his characters? "When we started this—I don't know about Gilbert, but I never said, 'This woman character is going to be just as good as a man character.' It just came out because I happen to like to draw women. That's why the women became main characters—because I like to draw them. And then they just turned into characters."

And speaking of characters, Jaime once said that his favorite, other than Maggie, was Terry, Hopey's ex-girlfriend and now ex-bandmate. "Terry's got a big ego, and I guess you could say she's a real bitch. She's very smart, plays great guitar, but when it comes to Hopey she's putty. And Hopey sometimes takes advantage of that." These days Jaime is fond of Tex, a gentle black skinhead drummer who's been traveling with Hopey since La Llorona split up. "I like him and I don't want him to fade out. He'll always be the guy there when you need him. His look is taken from a guy I met who was just so out of place—a big skinhead guy with glasses, a black guy, just the nicest guy in the world. He only hung around for a few months, but I was intrigued by him and turned him into one of my characters. And who better for him ☞

to hang out with than Hopey? Who knows; I may even have him get her pregnant." Jaime also recently introduced the rational, competent, all-around-happening-guy Ray Dominguez into the strip; he's Maggie's new boyfriend, and he's wondering what's going to happen when Hopey returns, as are all the readers.

Jaime's characters are drawn from his imagination, with a bit of input from real life. Izzy Ortiz Reubens is based on Exene Cervenka of X; Maggie is "just a million people rolled into one—even guys I know;" and Hopey's look was taken from seeing Jane Wiedlin back in the Go-Gos' LA punk days. "I liked that look—the little girl with the spiky hair." Hopey is every bit as acidic as Maggie is sweet, and some of her nastier traits are drawn from irritating scenesters Jaime's known and loathed.

"That's basically what Hopey comes from—seeing all these cute, tiny little girls going around picking fights with long-haired guys, and then when the long-haired guys would fight back, a million skinheads would jump on them. And the girls would walk away laughing. That used to really piss me off and I'd want to kill them, so I said, why not make Hopey that way? That'd be perfect."

Jaime's opinion of Hopey seems ambivalent—she's a real bitch, but she's also very appealing. "I fill in all of these characters and I leave it up to you if you're going to like them. And so far Hopey's everyone's favorite character! Most of my female readers see her as their favorite because she's so fiesty and says what she feels, but sometimes I think, 'You like that? After what she did?' I've never shown it, but I'll show it in the future, that there have been times when she's paid for it with a black eye or something. But she's safe because she's little and has a lot of big friends."

GOODBYE CRUEL SOUP

Gilbert and Jaime are great admirers of each other's work. Asked his opinion of "Human Diastrophism," a just-completed 100-page "Heartbreak Soup" story that is very possibly the best thing Gilbert has ever done, Jaime enthuses, "It's great. I didn't know where he was going with it for a while, but after I saw the last chapter...wow. I like his writing style and I like his humor. If there's one little flaw, I kind of pass it over. Maybe that's because I know where Gilbert's coming from and I know that if he blows it once, he won't do it again."

Gary Groth feels that Jaime and Gilbert are "two of the few cartoonists in the entire business who you can actually see growing. Most cartoonists don't really grow, they just continue. I think you can see that maybe a handful of cartoonists, like Crumb, Spiegelman and the Hernandez brothers are growing as artists. Jaime is moving away from fantasy elements toward a much more naturalistic mode of expression, which has reached its height so far with 'The Death of Speedy Ortiz.' And when Gilbert started 'Heartbreak Soup,' back in issue three, he began to dig deeper and deeper into the lives of the characters, culminating in 'Human Diastrophism.' 'Human Diastrophism' turned out to be a tragedy. Gilbert's work has had certain tragic elements here and there, but I think this is the first time the work culminated in the kind of poignancy that tragedy usually encompasses."

The *Village Voice* once described "Heartbreak Soup" as "a South American soap opera—a knotty Knots Landing with radical politics (detailing) the love affairs and intergenerational relationships of a neighborhood of working-class drudges and unemployed dreamers." Maybe, but "Heartbreak Soup" has a great deal more depth and compassion than a soap opera—in fact, it's closer in tone and content to 20th Century Latin American fiction, best exemplified by the work of Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, and Ariel Dorfman; it blends modernism with the folk tale and never loses sight of a larger political context.

Gilbert's stories reflect his concern with human behavior in all its forms, and his sympathetic eye has gazed upon just about every joy and sorrow that humans inflict upon themselves. In the microcosm of Palomar, daily dramas of love, hate, friendship, betrayal, sexual deviance, promiscuity, cowardice, ambivalence, child abuse, and murderous rage are acted out on a public stage. The lives of Gilbert's characters seem simple, but are they are growing desperate, more so as Palomar is reluctantly dragged into the modern age.

"Heartbreak Soup" has thus far followed the lives of a group of friends from boyhood to adulthood, and in almost every case each friend's life has been ravaged by brutality. As the characters grow older and life becomes increasingly complex, Palomar grows larger and colder—the town that was originally so small that everyone knew everybody else's business is now large enough to accommodate a serial killer. In fact, when a loopy young artist who's witnessed one of the killings posts portraits of the murderer around town, no one recognizes him—a circumstance that would have been inconceivable when Palomar was young.

Besides relating the tale of the serial killer, "Human Diastrophism" also devotes considerable space to the always-baffling nature of love and sex (rarely the twain shall meet, it seems), global politics and personal integrity. By the time the story has finished, Luba, the stupendously-endowed principal character of "Heartbreak Soup," has beaten her kids, slept with a half a dozen men (and a boy), and had what might be called a midlife crisis; meanwhile, one of Luba's daughters runs away with her lover, and another daughter is carried off by a horde of monkeys, then shot out of a tree by the town sheriff. The plot thread that ultimately assumes major importance, however, is the radicalization of Tonantzin, the town sexpot who previously seemed solely concerned about her orgasm and providing for her younger sister. At the shattering end of "Human Diastrophism," Tonantzin, who has left Palomar to "help people around the world topple their crummy governments," sets herself on fire. Her ashes fall on Palomar like snow.

If the story has an air of finality about it, it's intentional; Gilbert has decided to lay the "Heartbreak Soup" saga aside for a while. "The deal with 'Human Diastrophism' is that I wanted to do the last Palomar story using this group of characters," he says, "because I felt I'd spent too much time with these characters. So I decided to wrap up all of this stuff and quit for a while. It took a year to do it."

Gilbert has two distinct drawing styles—the gritty style he uses for "Heartbreak Soup" and a flashier, design-oriented style he employs for his black-humored "Twitch City" and "Errata Stigmata" tales. The latter sort of stories haven't appeared for

some time. "I couldn't fit anything else in," Gilbert explains. "I had to tell the story, I had to do 'Heartbreak Soup.' I really like using the futuristic style, but it's hard to write stories for. I created 'Heartbreak Soup' and Palomar because any kind of story I can think of, I can put in 'Heartbreak Soup.' And so I came up with all of these ideas and I put them in 'Heartbreak Soup' and I wound up not doing anything else." At this point, Gilbert isn't sure what direction he'll take during the Heartbreak Hiatus. "When I was working on 'Human Diastrophism' I thought, wow, I can't wait to finish this and just go wild and do all kinds of off-the-wall stuff, and here I am...and I don't have any ideas! I'm just sitting. It's not that easy to jump from what I was doing to something really different. It's easy to draw it, but it's not easy to come up with a story. So I'm probably going to adapt a folk tale for issue 27. That way it won't drive me crazy trying to write something, and I should be back into something by issue 28.

"I've been working so hard; I've had 'Heartbreak Soup' on my mind for the last two years. That's all I thought about. I don't want to stick to 'Heartbreak Soup' ever again the way I did. If I'm doing 'Heartbreak Soup,' I hope I'll be doing something else as well."

Gilbert managed to briefly link his futuristic style with "Heartbreak Soup" when he reused a very cinematic page from Errata Stigmata's "origin" story in the pages of "Human Diastrophism." "Here I was with the dilemma of having another murder to show," Gilbert says. "The readers were probably thinking, 'Well, how's Gilbert going to kill 'em this time?' I felt really dumb, like Frank Miller (the artist/writer responsible for *Elektra: Assassin*, *The Dark Knight*, and some extremely violent issues of *Daredevil*) or something, thinking 'How have people not been snuffed yet in comics?' I could have come up with something wild, but I thought, 'Hey, I've got a murder scene!'—the beginning of the Errata Stigmata story in issue 11. The weirdest coincidence is that they both landed on the same page in both issues."

As Jaime has created a microcosm in Hoppers 13, so Gilbert has fashioned his own little human ant farm in Palomar. "I wanted to create a strip that I could do for the rest of my life, but not necessarily using the same characters over and over or repeating the same stories over and over. I wasn't looking for a formula; I was looking for a base to start from. So I thought, let's do this like the beginning of man: start with a tiny little town with just a few people, then watch it grow. Then in twenty years I'd be doing it, and the characters would be the third cousins or grandchildren of the characters I started out with. I wanted to create something that would be around for a long time, because at the time it didn't seem that anything was made to last. Everything was 'high concept.'

"It's almost like escapism, a fantasy of a primitive town that doesn't need anybody else. But when you look at it realistically, there's usually poverty and disease (in primitive towns), which I haven't explored that much in Palomar, but which I will in the future. I was really concerned with ☞

concentrating on the characters at first, but by now I think the faithful readers know the characters inside-out, so I'll be able to move away from the soap opera storytelling. I've never been too crazy about it, but there it is."

Unfortunately, life is a soap opera, full of love, sex, money and death. Which for some reason prompts the question: Has the comfort and security Gilbert has found in married life affected his writing? "I think I'm actually more brutal than I ever have been," he responds with a laugh. One can't help but notice that the only happily-married couple in "Heartbreak Soup" are the sympathetic characters Heraclio and Carmen. "This is an awful thing to say, but usually married characters are tied down and they can't really go anywhere. When I do return to Palomar, in about a year, a lot more people will be married and there will be more kids."

Like Jaime, Gilbert has rebelled against what is "expected" of his comic book characters—that the good guys always be good, and the bad guys be unrepentant evildoers. Jaime has had to work harder to escape this trap, as his influences are largely drawn from mainstream popular culture; Gilbert's work has always been more literary and complex. The accessibility of Jaime's style and the relative difficulty of Gilbert's work could have created tension between the brothers, but both have been well aware of the situation; in fact, Gilbert has used it to his advantage. Wisely deciding that it would be silly to try to win a popularity contest with his brother by thinking up lovable characters, Gilbert instead decided to see just how far he could go in his quest to create a serious comic book that isn't pretentious or boring.

"When I first started this I was always afraid of making my characters unlikable. I think that might have been because Jaime's characters were so well received—everybody loved Maggie and Hopey, but they seemed confused by my characters. I thought, well, maybe my characters are too mean, or maybe the readers just don't understand them. But now I'm more confident. We have to be able to make our characters look bad. We have to take that chance. If they look bad, so what? I'm not putting together characters designed to be liked. At first I thought that might be necessary, but now I don't feel that way at all."

A good example of this is Luba, the big-breasted focal point of "Heartbreak Soup" whose behavior is often far more reprehensible than Hopey's, and who is, strangely enough, becoming almost as popular with the readers. "I'm a little surprised that now I'm getting letters from people saying how great Luba is. She's beating on her kids, she's screwing every guy in town! Before I never got much response about any of the characters."

And just why is Luba so fond of bedding down young boys? "My wife claims it's a fantasy of mine. It's just a dramatic device, a weird twist to her character. Maybe subconsciously it was a fantasy."

KEEPING IT LIQUID

Has success changed the Hernandez brothers? Not really, but then again, their success has been on a relatively small scale. How many people who would adore *Love and Rockets* will never read the magazine because they think of comics as a low-brow medium tailored to the taste of 10-year-olds?

Oh, well, best not to worry about such things; circulation is increasing, the bookstore editions are bringing Jaime and Gilbert to the attention of a mass audience, and their work has continued to improve. The brothers themselves have only one common gripe: they've become professionals working under deadline. Instead of drawing for fun, they draw for a living. Jaime says, "It's really bugged me lately that everything I've drawn in the past six years has been for the comic. I don't draw just to draw—it's to fill up the comic, to get it out.....I love *Love and Rockets* and I'm enjoying it as much as when we started, but times when I'm sleeping I think, why don't I have a sketchbook and just fill it? I gotta get myself to do it! I've found myself not doing certain drawings that I've had in my head because I don't want to draw a car, or I don't want to draw a street scene. I have to force myself to do that stuff, and that's really bad. There's a lot of stuff I've left out of *Love and Rockets* because I was too lazy to draw something.

"....(R. Crumb) has said that he's always drawing; if he doesn't draw for two or three days it just depresses him. I wish I could be that way. I draw in my sketchbooks about once a week, and I don't go out on the street drawing buildings or lamposts the way Crumb does. It's really hard to make yourself do that. I just sit in the house and draw whatever comes into my mind. I don't have the patience to sit there and draw a bridge, but that's what I should do."

Gilbert agrees. "We're bummed about it, that we don't just sit down and draw funny things like we used to. Everytime we draw, we're working, because drawing has become our work. Which isn't bad, because we love our work, but there's no leisure drawing anymore. It's partly our fault because our schedules are so erratic. If we woke up early in the morning and just drew for seven hours, then we'd have time to do that. But we don't. We'll draw a little bit in the morning, a little in the afternoon, a little at night—it's usually an all-day process. Which adds up to six or seven hours, but....I can still doodle pretty well, though. That's what keeps your drawing alive, keeps it liquid."

The Hernandez brothers have been justly praised for the quality of their work, but they're always quick to point out that although their comics often have serious themes, they're a lot of fun, too. Keeping things fun can be an effort, particularly when the word "genius" is thrown your way on a regular basis. "Never call me a genius—not 'till I'm dead," Jaime requests. "I've learned not to take it too seriously or let it go to my head. This has always been just a comic, and when people tell me that this is a work of genius I just say, 'That's really nice praise but, uhm, I know what I'm doing wrong.' I don't think anyone is a genius, unless Picasso was; I don't know how many drawings he ever had to crumple up because he fucked up on them."

Gilbert wouldn't call himself a genius, either, "but if other people want to, go ahead. It just encourages me. Woody Allen once said that the worst thing in the world you can do is be mediocre. I feel that way too, to an extent. When we started this we didn't want to add more crap to the world, because there's so much of it out there, in movies and in all forms of popular entertainment. When I read good reviews from intelligent people, people that I more or less respect, it encourages me that I'm working against the crap, not adding to it." ■

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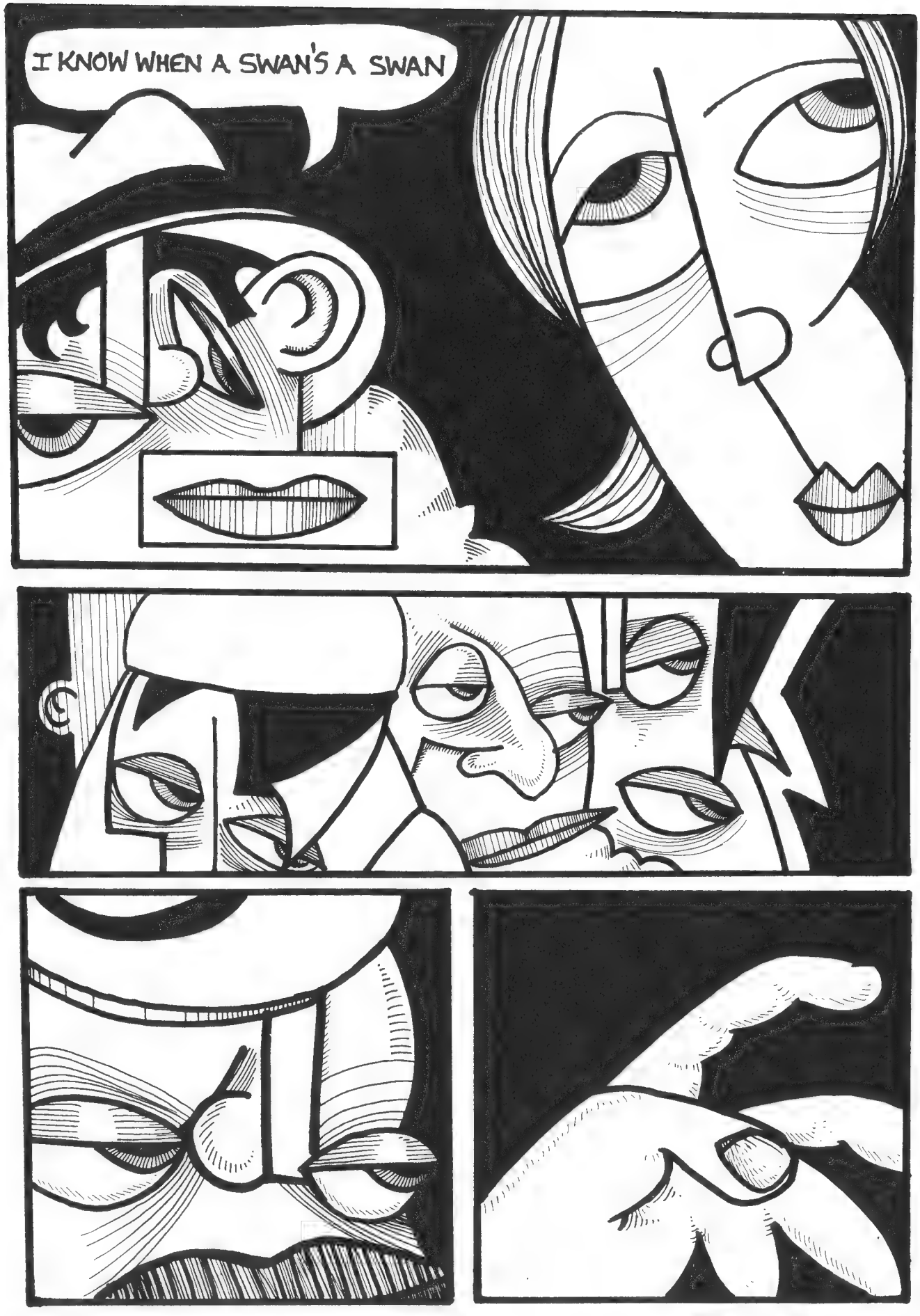

I KNOW WHEN A SWAN'S A SWAN

HEY!
I DIDN'T MEAN TO HURT OR OFFEND YOU... LET'S HAVE A DRINK AND TALK ABOUT IT...
UH... THEN HOW ABOUT COFFEE?

TRIPLE THREAT

The Blood-Soaked Brushwork of Writer/Director CLIVE BARKER

Clive Barker is the author of the six *Books of Blood* short story collections, the novels *The Damnation Game* and *Weaveworld,* and a number of historical and comic plays for the stage. He also wrote and directed the grisly horror film *Hellraiser* and is currently producing the film *Hellraiser II.* Barker has received more critical praise and popular success than anyone working in the horror genre since Stephen King first appeared. *Rolling Stone* critic Mikal Gilmore recently credited Barker with creating "a new sensibility in horror fiction that is as daring, frightening and merciless as the modern world itself."

What Barker's many American readers might not know is that the author/director has another talent: he's handy with a brush and pencil. In the early 1970s, Barker studied at the College of Art in Liverpool, where he picked up a few of the skills he's displayed on the wildly stylized covers of the English hardcover editions of the *Books of Blood.* Barker also included much looser, Japanese-influenced illustrations in a limited edition of his sprawling fantasy novel *Weaveworld.* On the next few pages, we've reprinted many of the *Weaveworld* illustrations, along with several previously unpublished works. Unfortunately, Barker's extremely detailed color work can't be adequately reproduced here. A much more extensive selection of Barker's artwork will appear in the Arcane Comix anthology *Fly In My Eye,* due out this fall. GREED asked Arcane publisher Steve Niles to quiz Barker on his approach to his artwork, the creative process, and the realities of commerce.

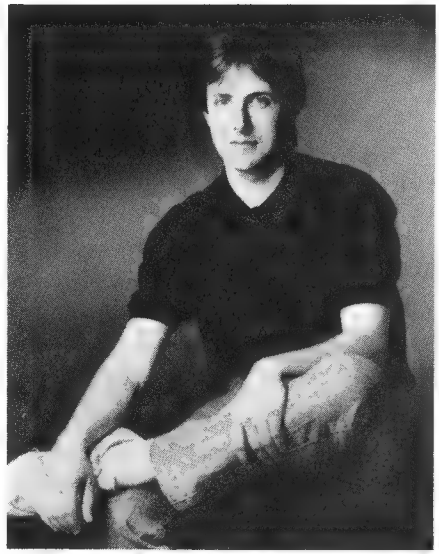


PHOTO BY LINDA MCCARTNEY

After you studied at the College of Art, I understand that you did a few sexually-oriented illustrations to help pay the rent.

(That was stopped) very quickly by Scotland Yard a long time ago. This was fifteen years ago, you understand, so it was really a heck of a long time ago. I don't know what happened to those; my memory is that they were quite mild, but clearly that wasn't the attitude of the police at the time. Most of the stuff I was doing was for private collectors who wanted phantastique pictures of some kind or other. Once in a while I would just do, for a small coterie of people in Liverpool, pictures of various kinds. I didn't make a living off of it, but it was enough to supplement my poverty.

The first illustrations I did for public consumption as opposed to private hands—the illustrations for private hands were essentially paintings rather than graphics—were the covers for the *Books of Blood.* They were for the first hardback editions, which came after the Sphere paperbacks, maybe two years later. Somehow they knew that I had done illustration. And of course I had done a lot of illustration that was tied into the theater work, which was not in the form of finished items, but (rather) costume sketches, masks, makeup designs, prosthetic designs, and scenery designs. I'd also produced posters and all that kind of thing. Some of that material will probably be reproduced in the *Shadows in Eden* book which is coming out next year. So there was a lot of stuff, but it was always a function of some other activity, a function of the theater activity...

Do you sketch out characters when you're writing?

Yes. Lots of creatures, geographies, faces, maybe even costuming—anything that helps make the reality as solid as possible.

You work in many styles and mediums. Your book covers are very tightly rendered and colorful, while the *Weaveworld* drawings are loose, black-and-white brush drawings.

I'm not married to any one approach. I do a lot of color work...All these ☞

INTERVIEW BY STEVE NILES
ALL ART ©1988 CLIVE BARKER

Frankenstein
Clive Barker

approaches offer different possibilities to get inspired into some kind of imaginative invention. (The brush artwork) is very much influenced by my love of Chinese and Japanese brush paintings. You almost get into a kind of fugue state doing them. They're things you generate swiftly after having walked on the pavement for a long time. The much more detailed ones— the ones for the *Books of Blood*, for example— require much more planning, you maybe take some source photographs and find material to use in relation to the material, and it's a completely different approach. One is meticulous and detailed and relates to my love of Bosch and Bruegel— very detailed stuff which takes a long time to do— and the other is spur-of-the-moment invention. Both of them have their pleasures. I like the *Weaveworld* pictures quite a bit, because they leap onto the page and they're either there or they're not there. The hour's work that you're doing is the culmination of a bunch of thinking and planning you've done before setting the brush to paper.

The *Weaveworld* drawings are very freeform, much different than conventional book illustration where an artist takes a scene from a book and depicts it. Were you afraid that the *Weaveworld* illustrations might limit the reader's own conception of the characters and environment?

I was trying to offer up something very non-specific. Those are very generalized illustrations. They're illustrations that are symbolic and metaphorical rather than actual. The piece of the blindfolded man with the tree of eyes growing out of his head is not representational of any particular character. It's closest maybe to Cal, because it's a symbol of the imagination rising from a man who's decided to close his eyes to the "reality" of the world. It's a teaser that's designed to lead the reader into the metaphorical life of the book, not the representational or superficial life of the book. None of the *Books of Blood* covers are representations of actual scenes— they're representations in the broadest possible sense of the tone or what I hope is the richness of the concept of the book, the burgeoning world in which images are pouring over images, all of which are interesting to themselves but none of which should be allowed to pin down the imagination of the reader.

I see a bit of similarity between your work and the art of Jean Cocteau. Was he an influence?

I love some of Cocteau's stuff— Cocteau as a man, as a legend, continues to exercise massive influence over me, in part because he did so many things with his life, so many kinds of art. What I do find useful in my thinking and dealings with the kind of work that I do is that Cocteau was essentially an instinctive artist. One of my many liabilities is that I can plan too much. It doesn't hurt me to remind myself of Cocteau's instinctive approach to things. The *Weaveworld* illustrations are a response to that instinctive instruction, as it were. I was very pleased with them both as a standing object and the way they fitted into the book. They didn't *insist* too much, and I think the trouble with illustrated books is that they may insist.

Do you still keep up with your illustration?

Oh sure, absolutely, but at the moment it's related purely to movie projects and book projects. I'm using it again as a function of something else. Part of the thing is that illustration is a

kind of halfway house in some ways for somebody like myself. I'm not about to produce something that is purely a volume of illustration, not in the next, say, two years or so. There isn't time in my schedule, though I would like to do that at some point. But I have to draw; I have to draw the same way I have to write. But it becomes a function of working in another medium. Many of the drawings are purely for myself as an aid to invention. Most of the ones you've got I hope are worthy of being looked at independent of that other function. But I think it's important to be mellow about things—I'm mellow about the books, I'm mellow about the movies. If people like them, that's great; I'm not going to get highhanded about them.

At a personal appearance you did at a DC club to promote *Hellraiser*, I watched you do about a hundred quick illustrations for people.

The whole point about that is to kind of demystify the act of art. I try to do that all the time. I try to make things that are functional. Doing a hundred illustrations in an evening is a great pleasure to me, and I hope it personalizes a book or it personalizes a jacket or on a few occasions that evening, it personalizes a piece of skin—a piece of somebody's *anatomy*—that's a great thing to be able to do. One goes on just doing these things and making the images, and maybe they'll linger on or maybe they won't.

What are you working on now?

Cabal, the new novel, comes out in September in America. It's a short horror novel which will come out in an edition that will also contain the last four novellas from the *Books of Blood*, which is basically Volume Six of the *Books of Blood*. It will be a 400-page book, a very nice edition. *The Damnation Game* came out in paperback and just got on the *New York Times* bestseller list, which is very nice. *Weaveworld* comes out in Pocket Book in what I think is going to be a very nice edition also in September. *Hellraiser II* comes out late September, *Hellraiser III* goes before the cameras late October. *Hellraiser III* is (subtitled) "Hell on Earth," by the way. My next two movies as director—one is a horror movie, one is a fantasy/supernatural movie—are lined up for next year. Plus there's a big new novel, a fantasy novel on the scale of *Weaveworld* that has the working title of *The Art*, which I delivered to my publishers at Christmas and will be out for September of next year. There is no limit!

As for adaptions of my previous work, Scott Gilmore turned over to us a really first-rate draft of a screenplay for "Summer Celluloid." It's great work, and of course he's a good Washington, DC boy. We've got many things coming from Arcane Comix, we've got work coming from Eclipse Comics, and we've got the Marvel Comics *Hellraiser* tie-in.

I was flipping through the new *Fangoria* (a horror movie magazine) and there's a half-page color ad promoting a line of *Hellraiser* merchandise.

Oh is there indeed? I haven't seen them.

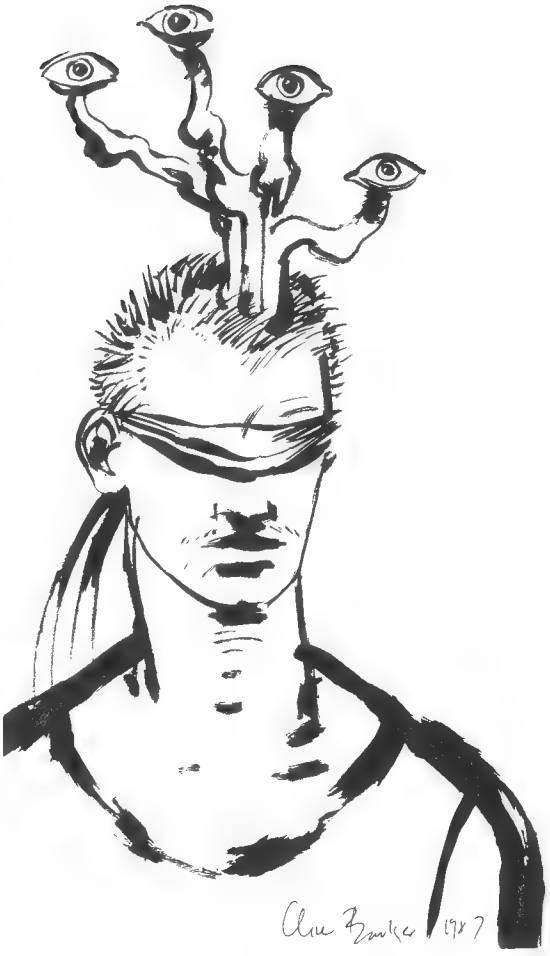
They've got coffee mugs, baseball caps, a Thermos, sports bags, posters, windbreakers, satin jackets, t-shirts, two kinds of sweatshirts and sweatpants.

Fuck.

They've got three teenagers wearing the clothes, and the rest of the stuff's pinned to the wall behind them. How do you feel about the merchandizing?

I actually haven't seen any of that stuff, but I can imagine....The fact is that you sign over the rights to that kind of thing, and if they're going to do it, they're going to do it. If it's quality produce, then I think that's fine; if people want the *Hellraiser* Thermos—though my god, the mind boggles!—then so be it. I'm only concerned about ripoffs, and that does irritate me. In the case of the *Hellraiser* material, one has no power whatsoever. It was in my contract that they could and would merchandize when and what they wanted. Actually, this is the first time I heard about this—I'm a little gobsmacked. But you know what these people are like. They'll make a buck any way they can....It pisses me off that I didn't know about it, but what can you do.

If people are going to buy something, let it be maximum quality stuff. We've been talking with the company that did the wonderful Freddy plastic model (the fiend from *Nightmare on Elm Street*), and I think he's going to do a Pinhead (one of the fiends from *Hellraiser*). That Freddy



they did was just great, it was a really nice piece of work. Now if somebody's going to do that kind of thing, I think it's great. The Japanese produced small jigsaws, the Japanese produced telephone cards, calculators—yeah, it's a laugh, isn't it? I'm still waiting for *Hellraiser* condoms.

They'll have little pins all over them—

Absolutely. A prick for everyone. ■

A few of Barker's illustrations for the limited edition of his novel *Weaveworld*. "They're illustrations that are symbolic and metaphorical rather than actual," Barker explains. "The piece of the blindfolded man with the tree of eyes growing out of his head is not representational of any particular character. It's closest maybe to Cal, because it's a symbol of the imagination rising from a man who's decided to close his eyes to the "reality" of the world. It's a teaser that's designed to lead the reader into the metaphorical life of the book, not the representational or superficial life of the book."

Frank and Samulah (and the Hole Where Dean Should Have Been)

BY KURT SAYENGA

THE WINDUP

Summer 1988. The biggest movies at the box office are a lame Eddie Murphy comedy and some damn animated thing that's way too crowded to get into. Asian-American role model Connie Chung is hosting a weekly series of "news features" that epitomize the worst trends in broadcast journalism. The amazingly daft trendmongers in England are reviving LSD and "Superfly" fashions, the combination of which should result in bad trips the likes of which haven't been seen since Altamont. Bookings at the local underground venues stink.

What's left? Just the massive wheels of marketing, ever churning, spewing out events best described as *unintentional surrealism.* Ladies and gentlemen, guys and dolls, headbangers and hardliners, clericals and professionals, I give you: The Monsters of Rock (Van Halen, Scorpions, Metallica, etc.) and Frank, Dean and Sammy—Together Again. Twin dynamos of capitalist greed prowling the countryside, looting the purses of the young and old alike, leaving naught but despoiled land in their wake, as well as the occasional commemorative booklet and poly/cotton tour t-shirt.

I felt compelled to attend at least one of these spectaculars, but knew that I would never survive both. But could I choose between the two?

Sure I could. The decision-making process took all of two-and-a-half seconds, based on these factors: a) I was so overexposed to Heavy Metal in my adolescence that I still set off airport security alarms from a distance of 50 feet, even when I'm stripped naked, which is the way I prefer to fly. (Call me zany, but I think clothing is just too *constricting* for air travel.) b) Is it really worth paying fifty bucks to sit in a baseball stadium filled with stoned redneck troglodytes just to see Metallica, the only decent band on the bill? c) The whole idea of watching Sinatra, Martin and Davis onstage, bringing that special brand of entertainment that I like to call Vegas to my town, jolted me like a heavy rotation of electric shock treatments.

As cultural artifacts, Samulah and Dean are right up there with Mount Rushmore and the ten-story Uniroyal tire sitting off of I-94 in Detroit. Samulah is show business incarnate, as his annual appearances on the Jerry Lewis telethon prove beyond a doubt; he's a cosmic anomaly, a tachyon traveling backwards through time and space, a sultan of insincerity, an avatar of overstatement. Dean has defined himself through his films and his fabulous 1960s TV variety show, which I dimly remember as a series of shots featuring Dean and an armful of babes, Dean and This Week's Special Guest and an armful of babes, and Dean and a microphone and a drink and, just offstage, an armful of babes.

Dean doesn't do much performing these days, and when he does he just grins, sings, kills time, obviously dying to get the gig over with so he can stretch out poolside with a bottle of Scotch. Is Dean just an easygoing crooner/comedian who got lucky and has coasted ever since? I think not. Dean is a true zen master. To Dean, unnecessary expenditures of energy are unthinkable, and anything that doesn't involve fucking or drinking is an unnecessary expenditure of energy. The earth may quake, the sky may fall, the fabric of time and space may rip in twain, but through it all, Dean will stand unyielding, secure in the knowledge that he could *not care less.* ☞

As for Sinatra...well, that's a special case. I don't think anyone who cares about music couldn't help but like the greatest pop singer of the modern era. Those who know him only for his obnoxious covers of show tunes or his lamentable private life should listen to his series of incredibly depressing records on Capitol, particularly *For Only the Lonely, In The Wee Small Hours* and *No One Cares*. The cover to *No One Cares* says it all: Frank on a barstool, gazing balefully into his whiskey as a roomful of happy couples mingle behind him. Sinatra's melancholy Capitol recordings are filled with genuine, but never overstated, emotion. They're perfect showcases for the artist's technically astounding singing. Those who think Joy Division's Ian Curtis wrote the book on gloom in pop music really must check out Frank, then imagine what the artist at his best could have done with "New Dawn Fades."

Of course, Sinatra was at the peak of his expressive powers in the 1950s, and that was a long, long time ago. But just as I would have seen Elvis Presley in the '70s had I the chance or the desire (neither of which I had at the time), so I decided to see Sinatra in the '80s. The guy is a living legend. (Some parallels do exist between Sinatra and Elvis—both were fabulously popular and handsome in their youth, both had steep declines and big comebacks, both had amazing voices and cut terrific records, and you wouldn't want either of them to appear as character witnesses at your statutory rape trial. Not exactly pillars of moral rectitude, these guys. But how many pillars of moral rectitude have risen from poverty and been given *carte blanche* to indulge themselves in every conceivable vice?)

So tickets were purchased and plans were made. A few days before the show Dean Martin took sick and ditched out of the tour. I suspected that this would kill most of the fun of the show, and I was right.

THE PITCH

I'll now resort to a present-tense chronological narrative in order to retain the flavor of the experience, and to save myself the effort of converting my notes into coherent sentences (you can call it laziness, babe, but Dean would understand).

Frank and Samulah are playing the Capitol Centre, a huge arena in the suburbs of DC. I'm a little apprehensive about attending, as I'm prone to anxiety attacks when I'm surrounded by 19,000 people (dating back to a childhood trauma I suffered at a Lynyrd Skynyrd show).

The parking lot is full of Cadillacs. The door guards are unnervingly polite. No strip-searches are in progress. It's twenty past eight and Samulah is already halfway through his act! Since when do big acts start on time? Since the audience is full of people who go to bed at 11:00.

We're in the "cheap" seats, if you call $30.00 cheap. This crowd would—the men are dressed in black tuxedos or Brooks Brothers Senior Vice President Gray, the women in Nancy Reagan red. The average age is 50. What's the difference between our seats and the good seats? In our seats, Samulah's two inches high; in the good seats, he's three inches high. Huge video screens help you see the S-man's every soulful expression or bug-eyed comic take, but paying thirty bucks to watch closed-circuit TV kinda turns my stomach.

The official FDS—Together Again tour book is full of pictures of the Rat Pack in its heyday, back when the boys did hospital time strictly for shots of penicillin, not for back pains, kidney failure, and blood transfusions. The tour book also throws in bios of each superstar, two of which are wildly gushing (Dean and Samulah's, in case you couldn't guess).

"His name is Sammy Davis, Jr., and he is without question the most complete entertainer of our time."

Okay, I'll buy that, particularly since "most complete" leaves a great deal of room for interpretation. It leaves almost enough room, in fact, for Dean's ego:

"(Dean) is a veritable bombshell in show business. A virtual quadruple-threat man in the four principal fields of entertainment...Martin is The Total Entertainer."

Both bios ultimately arrive at the conclusion that Samulah and the Deanster could lay legitimate claim to the Papacy if they weren't too darn busy keeping the masses satisfied with their own special brand of Entertainment.

Turning the pages with trembling hands, we find Sinatra's bio, which some might expect to read like a press release for God. Instead the praise is confined to the first paragraph: "Frank Sinatra, long acclaimed as the world's leading performer of popular music, is also, of course, an actor, recording artist, cabaret and concert star, radio and television personality and, on occasion, a producer, director and conductor. He has received dozens of professional awards and numerous honors for his humanitarianism."

The message is obvious: Sinatra doesn't have a thing to prove. Sinatra is so fucking huge that he's beyond hype. Sinatra is Sinatra, and that's saying a lot, and he knows it and everyone from his era knows it. Does he have a temper? You bet. Has he done a lot of sleazy things in his time? Could be. Did he undergo a chilling transformation from liberal activist to Republican Party lapdog sometime in the last twenty years? 'Fraid so. But does any of this make him less of a singer? Does this negate the fact that he is the best at what he does?

Am I getting tired of rhetorical questions?

Samulah's onstage now, rapping with the crowd. It's a lovefest, it's a special kind of a moment, it's Vegas.

"I gave up booze a few years ago and..." Huge ovation. Samulah mocks Michael Jackson. Samulah shakes his head at the modern world. Samulah dumps on Jimmy Swaggert and Jim Bakker. Samulah notes that "they ain't a black preacher in there nowhere!" The overwhelmingly white upper-middle class crowd laughs heartily. Samulah sings "I Gotta Be Me" as he makes a show of putting on two handfuls of diamond rings. "I would now like to do a medley of my hit." Uh-oh, we're in trouble now, it's the dreaded "Candyman!" The crowd gives the song a thunderous ovation.

The singer doesn't seem quite up to par, but that's understandable, as he has a cold. He's doing quite well for a guy with a cold, obviously trying to spread his energy out over the course of the set. The dancing that the S-man is famous for has been drastically cut back, although he does a little shuffling during "Mr. Bojangles." When Samulah leaves the stage an assistant wraps him in a white robe—just like James Brown!!!

The houselights go up. Down on the floor, in the good seats next to the stage, we see former Virginia Governor Chuck Robb chat with horrible sleazebag DC Mayor Marion Barry and his robotic wife Effie.

Time passes. Right around now Dean would be singing "That's Amore" and telling jokes. Instead I'm left with plenty of time to figure out what's wrong with the Capitol Centre. Then I realize: I can see the stage. I can see clear across the arena to Row ZZZZ. The show is sold out, the place seats 19,000 people, and *no one is smoking*. This is pretty weird, especially when you think about Sinatra's audience, who are largely products of a time when smoking was considered glamorous and sexy.

Before I can give the matter much more thought, the house lights fall and the horn section roars. Frank has arrived. He leads off with a jazzy version of "You Are the Sunshine of My Life." He's got a 40-piece orchestra in tow and he makes a point of telling you who wrote each song he sings and who arranged the tune for him. In most cases Sinatra relies on the classic arrangements by Gordon Jenkins, Nelson Riddle, Don Costa, Billy May, Quincy Jones, etc.

Sinatra's set is quite good, much better than I'd hoped for. His voice is obviously not what it was, but the man has such technical mastery that he's able to exploit his weaknesses, employing the raspy notes to great effect when he performs his barroom ballads. The material covers a wide range of periods and styles, mixing his tender songs with anthemic bones to the crowd such as "My Way." Few songs in Christendom can match "My Way" for sheer odiousness, but Sinatra's rendition tonight is greatly toned down from the bombastic '60s track. In fact, tonight's rendition is almost subtle, more a shrug than an arrogant boast.

The peak of the set for me comes at midpoint, when Sinatra blends "The Gal Who Got Away" with "It Never Entered My Mind." The version of "It Never Entered My Mind" on *In The Wee Small Hours* is one of the very best tracks Frank ever cut, delicately capturing the surprise and sadness of a man whose wife has made good on several broad hints about dumping him. There's no anger in the voice, just tenderness, hurt and bewilderment. Tonight's version can't match that—give the guy a break, thirty-three years have passed—but it's proof that Sinatra is still in control of his gift and knows exactly how to exploit his aging voice for emotive effect.

Sinatra says that these "saloon songs" are his favorite, and you can tell—his concentration during those numbers is evident, and even in a darkened sports arena he's able to create an atmosphere of intimacy.

The crowd, of course, applauds far more enthusiastically for the swaggering anthems. They give "New York, New York" an entirely unjustified standing ovation—kinda like the entirely unjustified standing o Led Zep got at the Atlantic reunion for their pathetic version of NYNY's rock and roll equivalent, "Stairway to Heaven." It's that wacky Pavlovian Response in action. Frank follows NYNY with a killer rendition of "One For My Baby" that the overfed boobs in the audience greet with respectful applause.

Perhaps the hardest thing facing talented performers with massive followings is keeping intact the ability to distinguish quality from mediocrity in the face of an audience that doesn't know the difference. Crowds like this applaud the loudest for the songs they've heard the most. Elvis became a zombie when he became more concerned with pleasing his fans than pleasing himself. He lost his confidence in his own judgement and assumed that his audience knew best. But sometimes it's a big mistake to give the people what they want. "The people" do not define art; artists do. Art is not democratic, even popular art. The People made Lionel Richie a millionaire and left Jaco Pastorious to die in the street.

Elvis let his fans lead him around by the nose. Frank plays a game—he pulls, lets himself be pulled, then pulls again. Sinatra knows what his best work was, and he's willing to mix it in with the crowd-pleasing crap. At least he can still tell the difference. (Besides, just about anything sounds good when Sinatra sings it.)

GRAND SLAM

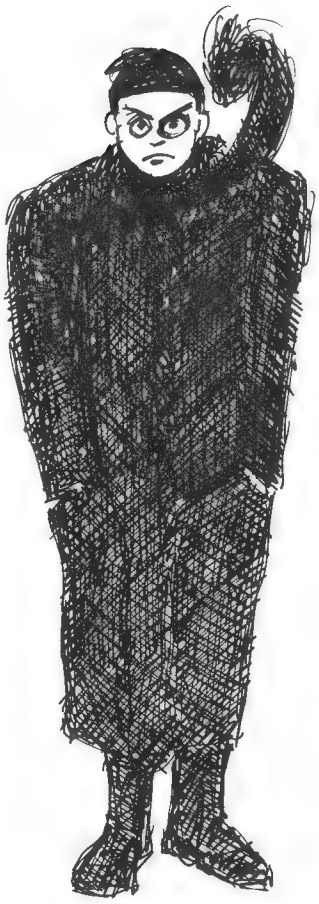
Frank goes away. Frank and Samulah come back. Right around now The Hole Where Dean Should Have Been makes its presence felt. Samulah is clearly not feeling his best, and Frank's attempts to fill the Humor Gap are embarrassing. Sample: Samulah starts into "That Old Black Magic." Frank chimes in, "That Old Brown Magic! That Old White Magic!" Samulah starts making brown jokes. Frank does a Dean impersonation. Samulah does a Dean impersonation. The crowd laughs during the whole thing. Frank makes plenty of jokes about Samulah, but Samulah makes no jokes about Frank. It's a bit unnerving. Close-ups of Frank and the S-man reveal that both would rather be out putting the pedal to the medal of their customized golf carts than going through the motions of "havin' a lovefest."

Frank and Samulah sing "Nathan Detroit" from *Guys and Dolls*, then split the scene. They don't return for an encore (unless the duet *was* the encore). The crowd rushes for the exits, tens of thousands of jingling Cadillac, BMW, and Lincoln Town Car keys in their manicured mitts.

On the way out we wind up sitting in traffic behind an Audi 9000 with custom plates that read SINATRA. Yipes! It's the Twilight of the Gods. Sometimes I wonder whether Dean was really sick at all. He always seemed a lot brighter than he pretended to be. ■

HYPERBOY

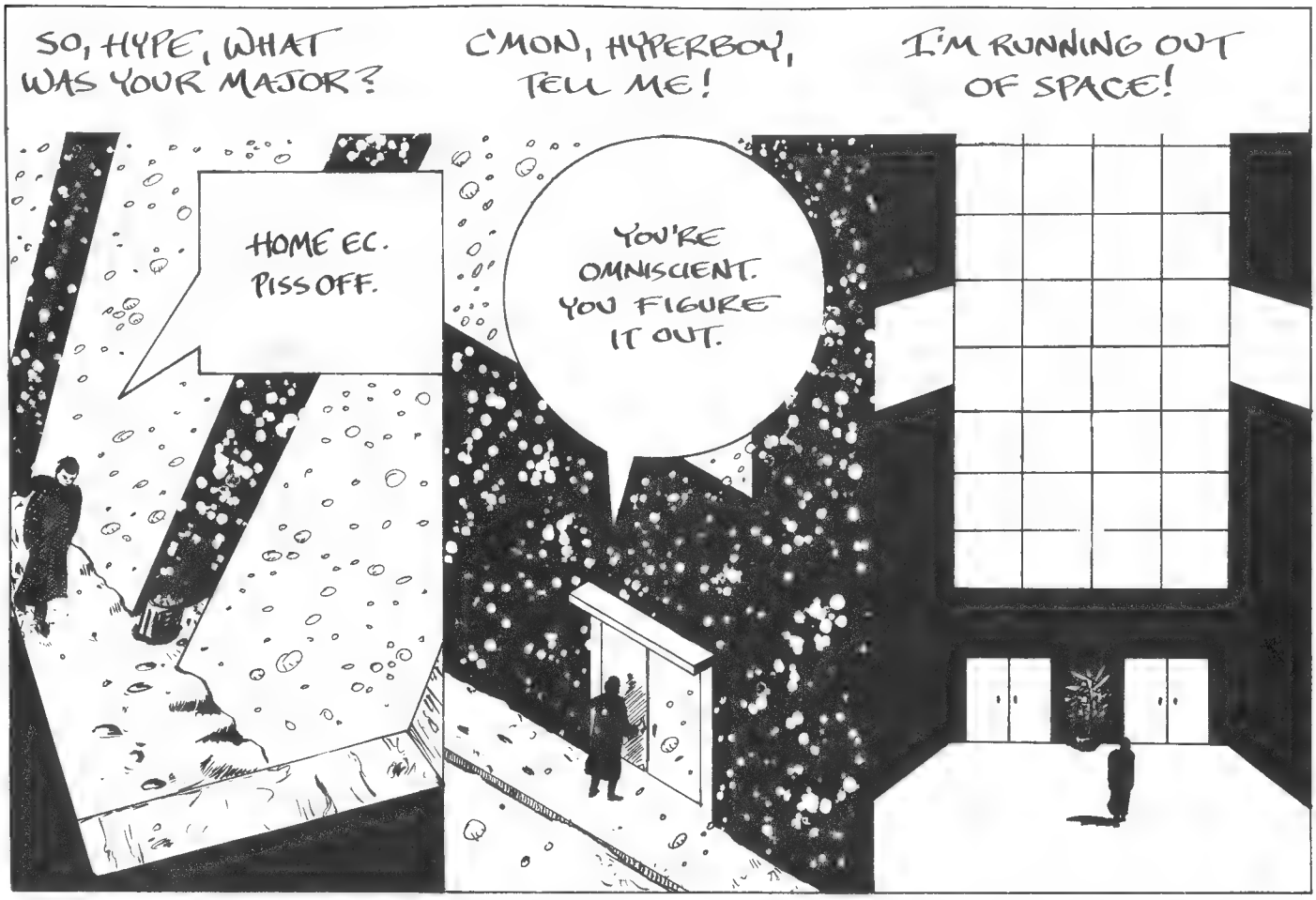
BY KURT SAYENGA



BUT YOU CAN'T. I'M THE OMNISCIENT NARRATOR.
SO, WHERE ARE WE OFF TO THIS MORNING?
WORK.
WORK? SINCE WHEN DO YOU HAVE A JOB?
SINCE MY STUDENT LOANS CAME DUE.

STUDENT LOANS? I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WENT TO COLLEGE.
I'VE GOT $9,000 OF DEBT TO PROVE IT.
SO WHERE DO YOU WORK? A RECORD STORE?
NOT ANY MORE.
YOU LOST YOUR TEMPER AND BLEW UP SOME TWIT WHO THOUGHT WIRE AND WIRE TRAIN ARE THE SAME BAND.
NO.

DOES THIS JOB IN ANY WAY UTILIZE YOUR TALENT FOR MAKING PEOPLE'S BRAINS EXPLODE?
TOO BAD. WELL, DO YOU HAVE TO WEAR A TIE?
BUT WOULD YOU SAY THIS IS A WHITE-COLLAR JOB?
NO NO NO.
HARDLY EVER.
LEAVE ME ALONE.


SO, HYPE, WHAT WAS YOUR MAJOR?
HOME EC. PISS OFF.
C'MON, HYPERBOY, TELL ME!
YOU'RE OMNISCIENT. YOU FIGURE IT OUT.
I'M RUNNING OUT OF SPACE!

JEEZ, HYPE, THIS HAS BEEN A PRETTY DULL ADVENTURE.

WHEN ARE YOU GONNA MAKE SOMEONE'S HEAD EXPLODE?

NEXT: HYPERBOY TAKES A MEETING, DRINKS TOO MUCH COFFEE, GETS MAD AND MAKES HIS BOSS' HEAD EXPLODE!!

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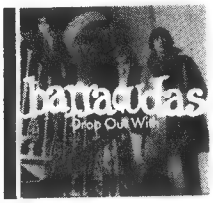
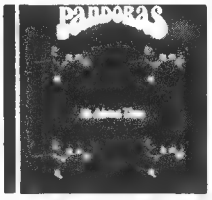


pandoras



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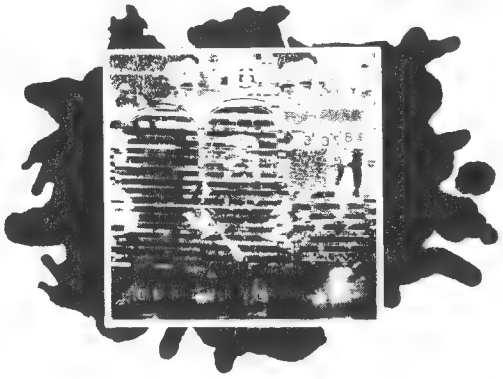

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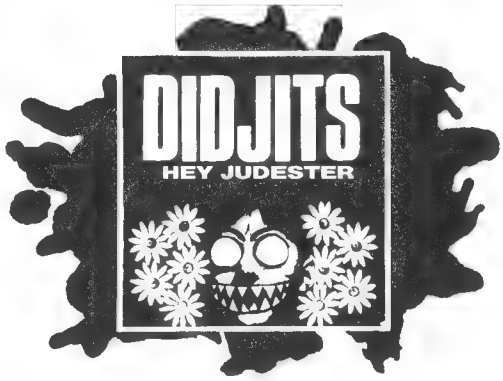

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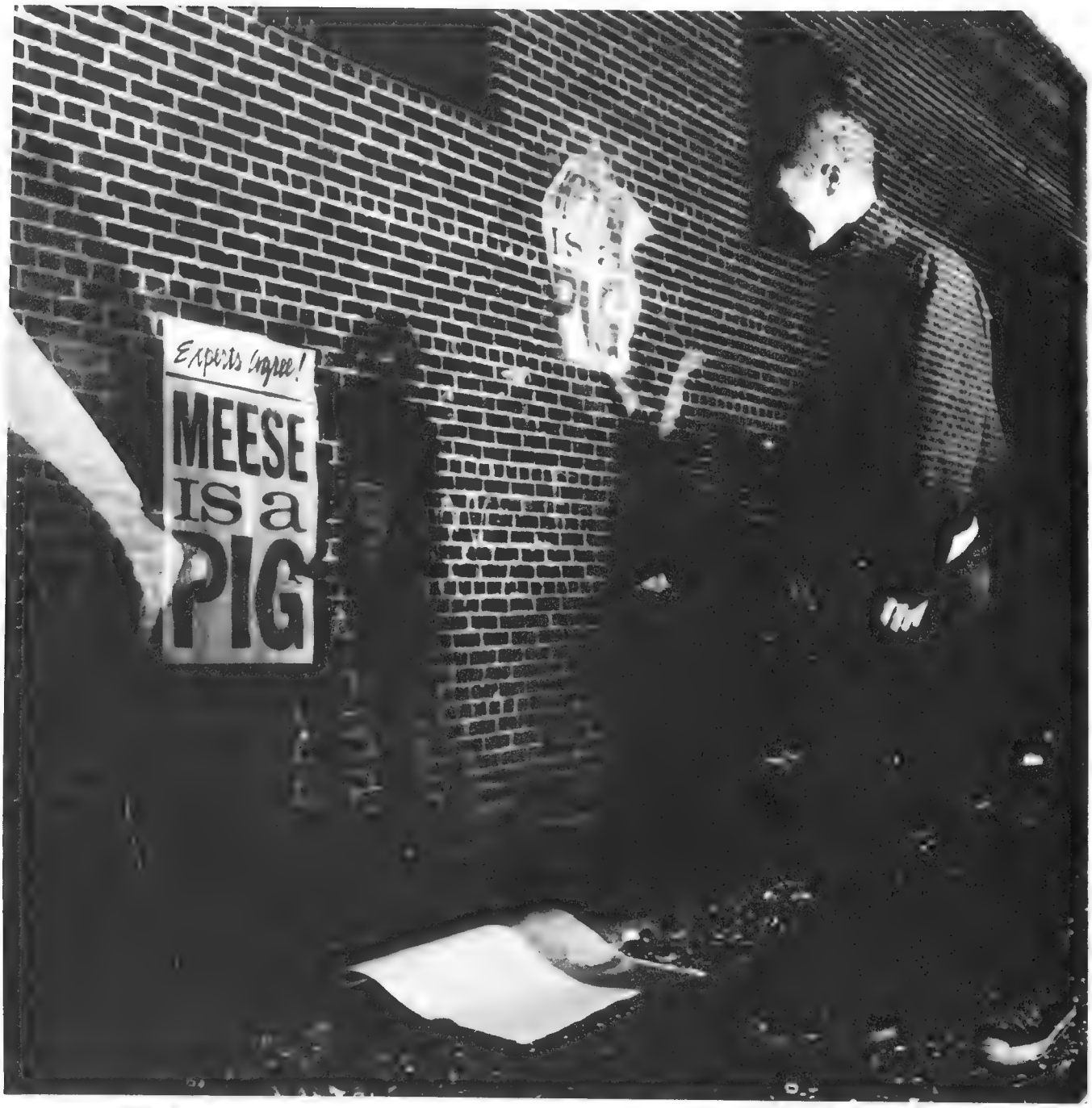
DROWNING IN THE PUDDLE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Most likely featuring Wire, Naked Raygun, Band of Susans, Ignition (honest), *Flaming Carrot* writer/artist Bob Burden, and a lot of other people you might or might not be interested in reading about. See page 41 for subscription information.

PHOTO BY JOHN FALLS



One of these days—maybe after the election—we'll explain what this was all about.

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I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S YOU, AGNES... I WAS AT YOUR BEDSIDE... YOU WERE PRONOUNCED DEAD!
PHENOM? WHO DID THAT TO YOU?!
AFTER EVERY-ONE LEFT HE INJECTED ME WITH PHENOM.
ART & Story © P. HAYES
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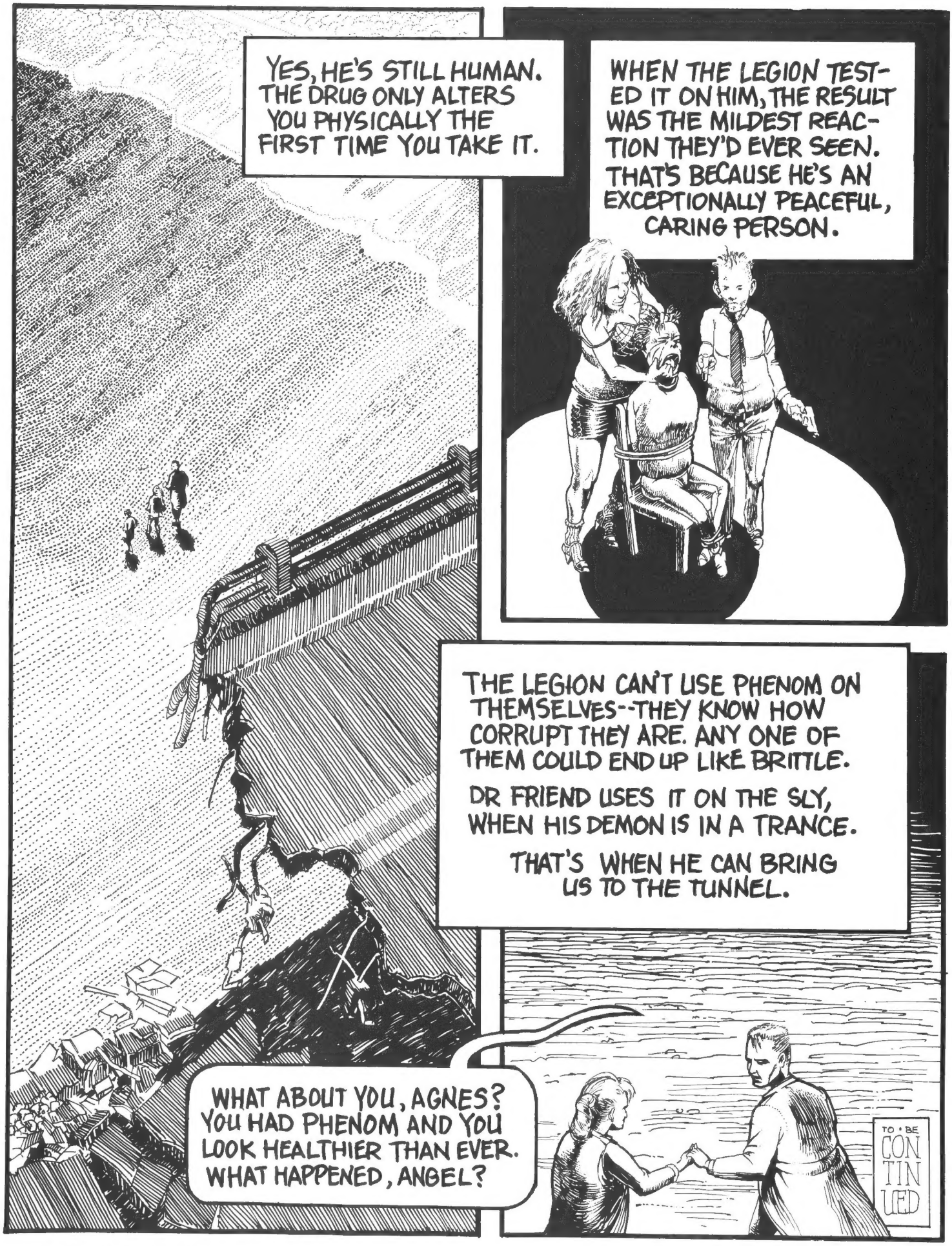
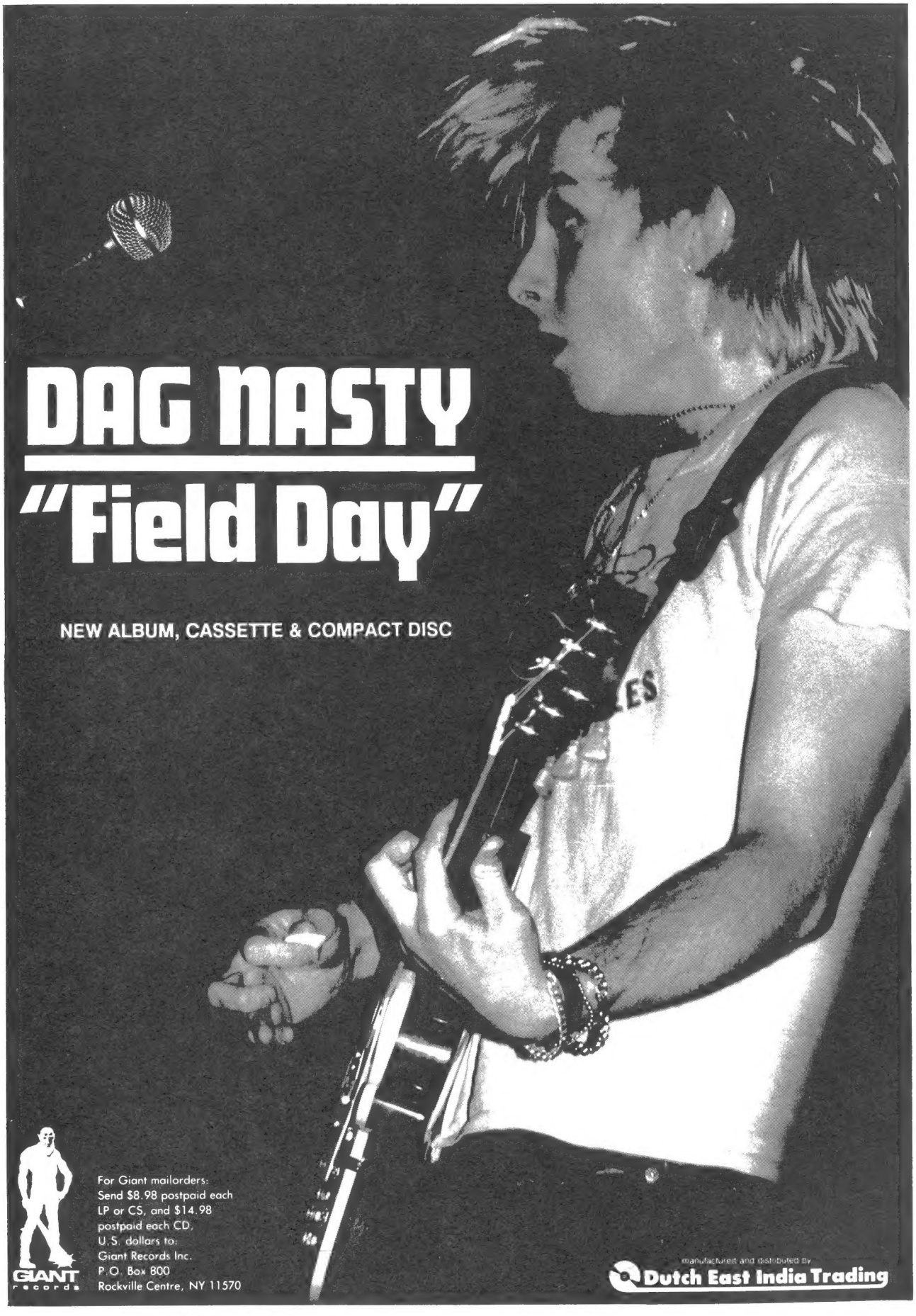
YES! YOU MEAN HE LET YOU SEE HIM?

YES. HE TOOK ME TO HIS LAB AND CHANGED MY BLOOD. I'VE BEEN OFF SMACK AND WORKING HERE AT STRAIGHT FLUSH RE-HAB EVER SINCE--ALMOST 2 YEARS.
WHY DIDN'T YOU CONTACT ME? YOU KNEW WHERE I WAS.
SQUINT, TO YOU I DIED LONG BEFORE I OVER-DOSED. YOU GAVE UP ON ME, REMEMBER?
BUT LET'S NOT ARGUE NOW. I'M GUESSING THE DOCTOR IS SICK...WHEN I SAW YOUR SON, I KNEW.
DR. FRIEND SPEAKS HIGHLY OF YOU, DEVON.
HERE'S THE NAME OF ONE OF HIS OLD COLLEAGUES--A DR. EVINRUDE--FROM BLUELINE HOSPITAL.
GOOD. I HOPE HE CAN GET US SOME SURGICAL SUPPLIES. DR. FRIEND GAVE ME THIS LIST JUST TONIGHT. HE'S FADING FAST.

FOR THE TWO HOLLOWELLS, THE 3-MILE HIKE FROM STRAIGHT FLUSH TO BLUELINE IS PUNCTUATED BY REVELATIONS, AS AGNES REVEALS SECRETS SHE HAS GUARDED FOR TWO YEARS. ALL THE WHILE, DEVON CLUTCHES THE BUNDLE OF CASH TUNNELMAN GAVE HIM, HOPING THE $5000 WILL BE ENOUGH FOR THE SUPPLIES.
THE LEGION FOUND ONE OF THE PHENOM TABLETS ON AIR FORCE ONE. THEY DID A CHEMICAL ANALYSIS. NOW IT'S BEING MANUFACTURED.
IT INVOLVES COMBINING CERTAIN CANCER CELLS WITH L.S.D. THE PHYSICAL & SENSORY ASSAULT THAT OCCURS AFTER TAKING THE DRUG IS THE BASIS OF ITS POWER. YOU EITHER CONTROL IT, OR IT CONTROLS YOU AS IT DID BRITTLE-AND HUNDREDS OF "VOLUNTEERS"
SOMEONE CAME UP WITH THE IDEA OF IRRADIATING THE SEWERS SO THERE'D ALWAYS BE PLENTY OF CANCEROUS RATS. EVERY TUMOR REPRESENTS A FEW MILLIGRAMS OF PHENOM.

OH, SWELL. THE TUNNEL IS RADIOACTIVE. I GUESS THIS MEANS I'M IN FOR SOME MAJOR COMPLEXION PROBLEMS.
THE TUNNEL ISN'T ENTIRELY REAL, DEVON. DR. FRIEND USES PHENOM TO *PROJECT* IT. YOUR CLEAR MEMORY OF THE TUNNEL ENABLES HIM TO TAKE YOU TO IT. ONCE THERE, HE CAN PUT YOU ANYPLACE *EITHER* OF YOU REMEMBERS.
THEN YOU REMEMBER THE TUNNEL FROM *YOUR* PAST?
YEAH, FROM WHEN I WAS A USER--NOT LONG AFTER YOU STOPPED PLAYING THERE.
DOING PHENOM THAT OFTEN CAN'T BE DOING MUCH FOR HIS LOOKS... IS HE STILL *HUMAN?*


YES, HE'S STILL HUMAN. THE DRUG ONLY ALTERS YOU PHYSICALLY THE FIRST TIME YOU TAKE IT.
WHEN THE LEGION TESTED IT ON HIM, THE RESULT WAS THE MILDEST REACTION THEY'D EVER SEEN. THAT'S BECAUSE HE'S AN EXCEPTIONALLY PEACEFUL, CARING PERSON.
THE LEGION CAN'T USE PHENOM ON THEMSELVES--THEY KNOW HOW CORRUPT THEY ARE. ANY ONE OF THEM COULD END UP LIKE BRITTLE.
DR FRIEND USES IT ON THE SLY, WHEN HIS DEMON IS IN A TRANCE.
THAT'S WHEN HE CAN BRING US TO THE TUNNEL.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, AGNES? YOU HAD PHENOM AND YOU LOOK HEALTHIER THAN EVER. WHAT HAPPENED, ANGEL?
TO BE CONTINUED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